

'Rethinking Africa's transcontinental continuities in pre- and protohistory'

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The relevance of Buddhism and Hinduism for the study of Asian-African transcontinental continuities

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ABSTRACT. The argument considers selected aspects of South and South East Asian culture and history (the kingship, musical instruments, ceramics and gaming pieces), against the background of the results (here briefly summarised in Section 2) of the author's earlier results into transcontinental continuities between Asia and Africa in the field of divination and ecstatic cults. After posing preliminary methodological questions, the leading framework that emerges is that of a multidirectional global transcontinental network, such as appears to have gradually developed since the Neolithic. Having argued the possibility of Hinduist and Buddhist influences in addition to the well-acknowledged Islamic ones, the next question discussed is: what kind of attestations of possibly transcontinental continuities might we expect to find in sub-Saharan Africa? From a long list, in addition to divination three themes are highlighted out as particularly important: ecstatic cults, kingship, and boat cults. The discussion advances conclusive evidence for the Hinduist / Buddhist nature of the state complex centring on Great Zimbabwe, East Central Zimbabwe, as a likely epicentre for the transmission of South-East-Asian-inspired forms of kingship and ecstatic cults. A provisional attempt is made at periodisation of the proposed Hinduist / Buddhist element in sub-Saharan Africa, and the limitations of transcontinental borrowing in protohistorical and historical times is argued by reference to an extensive prehistoric cultural substratum from which both South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are claimed to have drawn and which becomes manifest, for instance, in the tree cult. On the basis of future research advocated here, new insights in transcontinental continuities are to be expected, that throw new light on the extent to which Africa has always been part of global cultural history, and should not be imprisoned in a paradigm that (out of a sympathetic but mistaken loyalty to African identity and originality) seeks to explain things African exclusively by reference to Africa.

¹ The empirical basis for this argument lies, in addition to extensive library research, in my historical and ethnographic research among the Nkoya people of Zambia since 1972; my research into the *sangoma* cult in Southern Africa since 1988; shorter explorations throughout Southern Africa, in Cameroon, Benin and Guinea-Bissau over the years; and extensive travelling and exploratory fieldwork all over East, South East and South Asia from 2002 onward. While some of this research has been self-sponsored, I am greatly indebted to the following institutions and persons for funding or facilitating these trips and stimulating my research in and on these various locations: the African Studies Centre (Leiden) over the years, and its succession of directors; the Department of Sanskrit and Asian Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, USA, and its chair Michael Witzel; the Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam and its Dean Wiep van Bunge; the Philosophical Faculty, Parahyangan Catholic University, Bandung, Indonesia; the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities, Université Yaounde I, Yaounde, Cameroon. My wife Patricia was a perceptive companion on most of the recent Asian trips, and moreover contributed to them financially. I wish to express my gratitude to the African Studies Centre, the Leiden University Foundation (LUF) and the Philosophical Faculty for funding the present conference; to Marieke van Winden for indispensable contributions towards its realisation; Gitty Petit for advice on funding; and Ton Dietz for general advice and encouragement.

1. Earlier insights and perspectives brought to my Africanist encounter with South and South East Asia

Before turning to a discussion of the South and South East Asian connection in African pre- and protohistory, let me present a few of the findings on Chinese-African connections, such as brought out by my comparative and historical research, since 1990, into the transregional background of Southern African divination systems. This will help us to conceive of an analytical framework in which such transcontinental continuities may appear as conceivable, even plausible, in the first place.

1.1. African divination, and China

1.1.1. Africa and China

In my keynote address for this conference I have indicated the great extent to which the contemplation of transcontinental continuities has been counterparadigmatic, even anathema, for most present-day Africanists (and Asianists, for that matter). Yet, fortunately, throughout the 20th century Sinologists and Africanists in East and West have collaborated to develop a coherent picture of the extensive contacts between China and the East African coast,² A rapidly increasing production of Chinese scholarship is now correcting the potential Eurocentrist one-sidedness of such Western approaches, have provided ample information on the extensive maritime relations between China and sub-Saharan Africa.³

² Chang Hsing-lang, 1930, 'The Importation of Negro Slaves to China Under the T'ang Dynasty,' *Bulletin of the Catholic University of Peking*, vii (1930), 37-59; Duyvendak, J.J.L., 1938, 'The True Dates of the Chinese Maritime Expeditions in the Early Fifteenth Century,' *T'oung Pao*, XXXIV (1938), 341-412; Duyvendak, J.J.L., 1949, *China's discovery of Africa*, London: Probsthain; Filesi, T., 1972, *China and Africa in the Middle Ages*, tr. D.L. Morisen, London: F. Cass in association with the Central Asian Research Centre; Sutton, J.E.G., 1974, 'China and Africa in the Middle Ages,' *African Affairs*, 73, 291: 238-239; Winters, C.A., 1979, 'Trade between East Africa and China,' *Afrikan Mwalimu*, (January 1979) pages 25-31; Snow, P., 1988, *The star raft: China's encounter with Africa*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson; Li Anshan. 2000. *Feizhou Huaqiao Huaren Shi (A History of Chinese Overseas in Africa)*. Beijing: Overseas Chinese Publishing House (with an adequate picture of Ancient Chinese representations of the South African coastline); Lin Bin, 2005., ed., *Zheng He's voyages down the Western Seas*, Beijing, China Intercontinental Press; Davidson, Basil., 1959, *Old Africa Rediscovered*, London: Gollancz, new edition 1970; Wheatley, Paul, 1975, 'Analecta Sino-Africana Recensa', in H. Neville, Chittick, H.N., & R.I. Rotberg, eds., *East Africa and the Orient: Cultural syntheses in pre-colonial times*, New York: Africana Publishing Co. , P. 104 – 107; Wheatley, P., 1975, 'Appendix II: Notes on Chinese texts containing references to East Africa', in: H. Neville, Chittick, H.N., & R.I. Rotberg, eds., *East Africa and the Orient: Cultural syntheses in pre-colonial times*, New York: Africana Publishing Co. , pp. 284-290; Schwarz, E.H.L., 1938, 'The Chinese connection with Africa', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 3rd series, 4: 175-193; Fripp, C. E., 1940, 'A Note on Mediaeval Chinese-African Trade,' *Nada [Native Affairs Department Annual]* , XVII (1940), 88-96; Fripp, C. E., 1941, 'Chinese Mediaeval Trade with Africa,' *Nada [Native Affairs Department Annual]* , XVIII (1941), 18; Hirth, F., 1909, 'Early Chinese Notices of East African Territories,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, XXX (1909), 46-57.

³ One of the interesting suggestions emerging is that the name of Somalia may derive its name from Chinese 索马里 *Su Ma Li*, although its apparent meaning 'Rope-horse-community/halfmile/suffering' does not make much sense beyond evoking conditions of navigation. Which makes one wonder whether the same Chinese etymology would attach to the phonetically very close name of *Sumer / Šumr*, the name which the Semitic-notably Akkadian-speaking successors of the Sumerians gave to their predecessors. Chinese mercantile penetration into the Red Sea seems to have occurred in the context of Admiral Zheng He expeditions in the

Meanwhile, in more recent years, Chinese scholars⁴ have brought to light convincing evidence that, to East Asian mariners after the T'ang 唐朝 dynasty, the outline of the South African coast had few secrets.

Fig. 1 presents a late medieval Chinese depiction of East and South Asia and of the African coast from Aden to the Bight of Benin. Twentieth-century research has brought to light a number of such maps as proofs of extensive Chinese contacts, not only with East but also with South and West Africa. As contemporary nautical manuals indicate, Chinese ships commonly called on the harbours of the Persian Gulf in ^cAbāšīd times (c. 1000 CE).

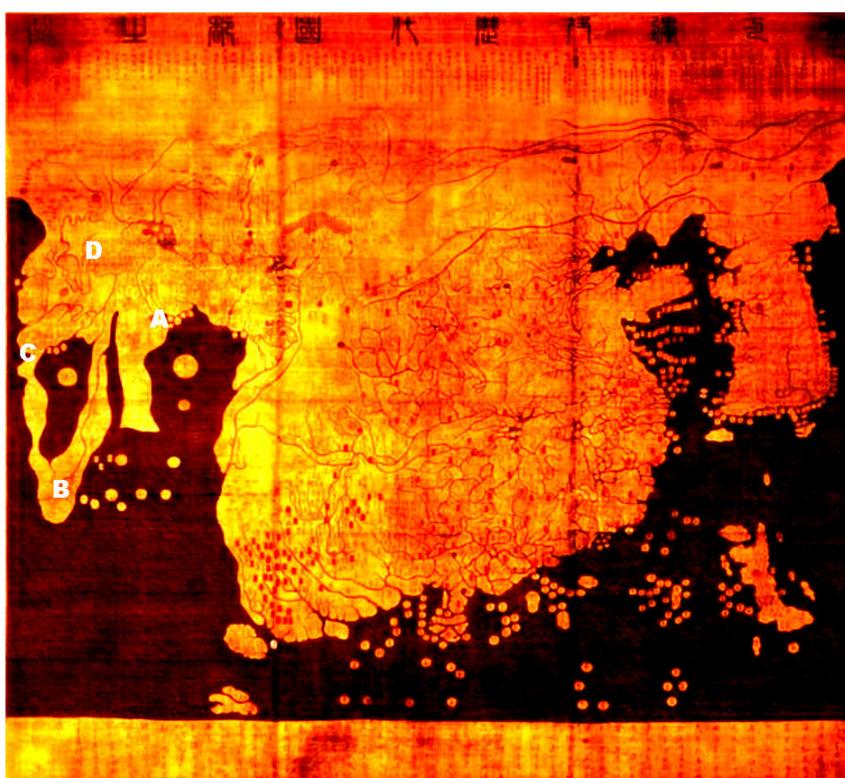
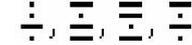


Fig. 1. The Korean Kangnido map (1402). I have indicated major regions for the historical use of divining bowls (red discs), -- (A) Mesopotamia; (B) Vanda (C); Bight of Benin; (D) Ancient Greece.

early 15th c. CE. Elsewhere (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, o.c.; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., in preparation (a), *Out of Africa or out of Sundaland: Mythical discourse in global perspective*) I propose an Austric, i.e. Sunda-related, etymology for the name of the mythical land of Dilmun, which is usually identified as the island of Bahrayn in the Persian Gulf.

⁴ But also cf., in the West: Fuchs, W., 1953, 'Was South Africa Already Known in the 13th Century?' *Imago Mundi*, IX (1953), 50-51; Mills, J.V., 1954, 'Chinese Coastal Maps', *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 11, 1954 (1954), pp. 151-168.

1.1.2. African divination, and China: Introductory remarks

In my comparative work on Old World divination systems, I became aware of the distinct possibility of Asian-African borrowing already nearly two decades ago. Here I concentrated on geomantic divination. Both Chinese geomantic divination (易經 *yì jīng*, often designated ‘*I Ching*’ in the West) and African geomancies, as well as Islamic ones from ^cAbbāsīd Mesopotamia (c. 1000 CE) and the Indian Ocean forms derived from the latter, all operate on the basis of an interpretative catalogue of 2^n configurations, n varying from 4 yielding 16 basis position (Southern Africa) to 8 (256) (West Africa), with China occupying an intermediate position with 6 (64).⁵ While these are the mathematics underlying the composition of the interpretational catalogues on the basis of which very specific divinatory pronouncements are being made, divination must in the first place ascertain where to look in the locally prevailing divinatory catalogue. This question is decided on the basis of a random generator, which produces one or a series of chance outcomes, which by virtue of locally established, intersubjective rules produces a particular figure (e.g. a hexagram (e.g. ) as in *yi jing*, or a geomantic combination symbol (e.g. ) as in ^c*ilm al-raml* and the divination systems derived from the latter in East, Southern and West Africa,⁶ in India, and in Europe since the height of the Middle Ages. The random generators used in geomantic divination vary greatly, from the casting of coins and/or milfoil stalks in *yi jing*, to the reading of a zodiac-based divination compass throughout East and South East Asia (the likely basis also for the medieval *zairja* divination circle as described by Ibn Khaldun),⁷ the casting of wooden, ivory or leather dice or tablets (*hakata*) in Southern Africa, the manipulation of divining

⁵ Cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1996, ‘Transregional and historical connections of four-tablet divination in Southern Africa’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 26, 1: 2-29; and my Leiden key note, 2005, o.c.

⁶ On West African geomantic divination, cf. Apostel, L., 1981, *African philosophy: Myth or reality*, Gent: E. Story-Scientia, ch. vii: ‘African geomancy, formal logic, and force metaphysics’, pp. 214-244; Abimbola, W., 1983, ‘Ifa as a body of knowledge and as an academic discipline’, *Journal of Cultures and Ideas*, 1: 1-11; Abimbola, W., red., 1975, *Sixteen great poems of Ifa*, no place: UNESCO (also excerpted in: Abimbola, W., 1991, ‘Poesie VI: Aus “Sechzehn große Gedichte aus Ifa”’, in: Kimmerle, H., red., *Philosophie in Afrika: Afrikanische Philosophie: Annäherungen an einen interkulturellen Philosophiebegriff*, Frankfurt am Main: Qumran, pp. 226-234); Akiwowo, Akinsola, 1983, ‘Understanding interpretative sociology in the light of oriki of Orunmila’, *Journal of Cultures and Ideas*, 1, 1: 139-157; Aromolaran, A., 1992, ‘A critical analysis of the philosophical status of Yoruba Ifa literary corpus’, in: H. Nagl-Docekal & F. Wimmers, ed., *Postkoloniales Philosophieren Afrika*, vol. 6, Wien: Oldenburg, p. 140-154; Eze, E., 1993, ‘Truth and ethics in African thought’, *Quest: philosophical Discussions*, 7, 1: 4-18; Makinde, M.A., 1988, *African philosophy, culture and traditional medicine*, Athens (Oh.): Ohio University Center for International Studies; Tunde Bewaji, 1994, ‘Truth and ethics in African thought: A reply to Emmanuel Eze’, *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, 8, 1: 76-89; Uyanne, F.U., 1994, ‘Truth, ethics and divination in Igbo and Yoruba traditions: (A reply to Emmanuel Eze)’, *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, 8, 1: 91-96; Maupoil, B., 1943, *La géomancie à l’ancienne Côte des Esclaves*, Paris: Institut de l’Ethnologie; Jaulin, R., 1966, *La géomancie: Analyse formelle*, Cahiers de l’Homme, Ethnologie—Géographie—Linguistique, N.S., iv, Paris: Mouton. On East African and comparative forms of geomantic divination: Trautmann, R., 1939-1940, *La divination à la Côte des Esclaves et à Madagascar: Le Vôdoû Fa — le Sikidy*, Mémoires de l’Institut Français d’Afrique Noire, no. 1, Paris: Larose; Hébert, J.C., 1961, ‘Analyse structurale des géomancies comoriennes, malgaches et africaines’, *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, 31, 2: 115-208; and my various publications on divination cited below.

⁷ Ibn Khaldûn, 1980, *The Muqaddimah: An introduction to history*, I-III, translated from the Arabic by F. Rosenthal, second printing of second edition, Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press, 1980; first edition Bollingen Series XLIII, New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc, 1958; written in Arabic 1377; also: al-Zanati, Muhammad, *Kitab al fasl fi usul ‘ilm al-raml*, Kairo 1390 H (= 1970 AD), lithograph.

chains consisting of four strings each of which can take two values (up or down) due to a coin or cowry attached to it, the casting of cowries or nutshells in Southern and Western Africa (on a wooden tray or in a bowl), or the generation of the geomantic figures from repeated chance procedures such as hitting the ground with a stick in a near horizontal movement, and counting whether the resulting series of indentures is of an odd (stroke) or an even number (dot).

1.1.3. Divining bowls and their connections in space and time

An interesting case for Chinese-African continuities in divination can be made for wooden divination bowls, such as attested in historical times (mainly from the nineteenth century CE on) both in Southern Africa and on the Bight of Benin (Nigeria).⁸ Soon after their discovery the signs in the rim were interpreted as some kind of zodiac, but scholars were puzzled by their sheer number: well over thirty, rather than the 12 one was accustomed to on the basis of Western, South Asian, and Chinese astrology. The solution to the puzzle probably lies in early Chinese astrology. In earliest times the well-known Chinese zodiacal cycle of 12 animals spanning 12 years (not months) was depicted as comprising not 12 but 36 animals, both real and fabulous. These animals were represented on the rim of a Chinese divination board, i.e. a planisphere which must be considered a predecessor of the well-known Luo Pan 羅盤 geomantic compass which is still in use among the practitioners of the Chinese spiritual location method called *feng shui* 風水. A similar (but not identical) list of c. 36 animals is containing in a mystical work on the Five elements *Wu-hsing Tu-I* by Hsiao Chi 小琪, of the middle of the first millennium CE (Sui dynasty 隋朝 581-618 CE).⁹

⁸ Cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., in press [2008], 'African divination across time and space: The typology, intercontinental connections, prehistory, and intercultural epistemology of sub-Saharan mantics' paper prepared for: Walter E.A. van Beek & Philip Peek, eds., *Realities re-viewed/ revealed: Divination in sub-Saharan Africa*, based on the 2005 Leiden international conference; more extensive version at: http://shikanda.net/ancient_models/divination_space_time_2008.pdf illustrations of such Venda bowls are available with Bent, J.T., 1969, *The ruined cities of Mashonaland*, Bulawayo: Books of Rhodesia, Rhodesiana Reprint Library, volume 5, facsimile reproduction of the third edition, Longmans, Green & Co., London/New York/Bombay, 1896 [first edit 1892] : frontispiece (see my Fig. 3); Canby, C., 1980, *The past displayed: A journey through the ancient world*, Oxford: Phaidon, p. 31; and Nettleton, A.C.E., 1984, 'The traditional figurative woodcarving of the Shona and Venda', Ph.D. thesis, University of Witwatersrand. Some West African counterparts are to be found in: Frobenius, L., 1954, *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas*, Zürich: Phaidon; first published Wien 1933; Skinner, S., 1980, *Terrestrial astrology: Divination by geomancy*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

⁹ Cf. Walters, D., 1989, *Chinese astrology: Het interpreteren van de openbaringen van de boodschappers des hemels*, Katwijk aan Zee: Servire, Dutch. tr. of D. Walters, 1987, *Chinese astrology*, Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press., p. 80.



(a) Venda divining bowl from Northern Limpopo Province (formerly Transvaal), South Africa, © <http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/oracle/soafBowlL.html>; (b) A wooden divining bowl found c. 1890 near Great Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe, Africa; Bent 1892: frontispiece (c) Yoruba divining bowl. © http://www.toledomuseum.org/Collection_NewAccessions.htm#v; (d) Ancient Greek *kylix* bowl, possibly used for divination <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/vaticano/ETb-Kylix.jpg>; (e) Mesopotamian divining/magical bowl, c. 600 CE; © <http://www.trocadero.com/PassageToAntiquity/items/392508/en1.html> – such bowls have been attested throughout the 1st millennium CE in Zoroastrian Iran, Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine.¹⁰ In Fig. 1, presenting a late medieval East Asian nautical map, I have marked the regions corresponding with these bowl types: A. Mesopotamia; B. Venda; C. Bight of Benin and D Ancient Greece. Only D seems to lie outside even the far periphery of Chinese maritime contact, yet was of course strongly influenced by Mesopotamia, in divination, astrology, other proto-sciences including mathematics and astronomy, in mythology etc.

Fig. 2. Divining bowls through time and space

¹⁰ Also cf.: Nettleton, by Anitra, n.d., ‘Venda Divining Bowl (Ndilo)’, at: Art and oracle: African Arts and Rituals of Divination, A scholarly resource from the Metropolitan Museum of Arts, at: <http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/oracle/soafBowl.html>; Davis, S., 1955, ‘Divining bowls, their uses and origin: Some African examples and parallels from the ancient world’, *Man*, 55 (143): 132-135.



(a) Feng shui compass (<http://www.mcallen.lib.tx.us/staff/fengshui.htm>); (b) Bronze mirrors (Chinese and Javanese) salvaged from South Chinese Sea shipwrecks (http://www.forbes.com/2001/04/04/0404hot_11.html); (c) Chinese divinatory magnetic ladle, representing Ursa Major and constituting one of the earliest forms of the nautical compass (http://www.csupomona.edu/~plin/lis201/images/chicompass_big.jpg)

Fig. 3. From Chinese nautical instrument to African divination apparatus?

The spoon-shaped magnetic needle on a special grid, as in Fig. 3, may be considered a developed form from a prototypes where a magnetic needle on a simple piece of wood or paper would float on a water surface in a bowl – another possible prototype for the Venda and Nigerian divining bowl, and notably one that is intimately connected with the inevitably nautical nature of any medieval Chinese-African connections.

1.1.4. Connections in space and time of the random generator in geomantic divination

Moreover the cowries that are cast in the context of dominant forms of West African divination are not indigenous but come from the Indian Ocean, often via trading networks involving Asian and European intermediaries; in China, the character for money 貝¹¹ is a schematised representation of the cowry.

The back-front asymmetrical tablets thrown in African geomantic divination are similar, in form and use, to the lunar-shaped temple blocks that feature in Chinese popular divination. Is it possible to cast light on the origin of the Southern African geomantic dice? If (in the light of extensive parallels in Madagascar, the Comoro Islands, West Africa, and Medieval and Early Modern European Renaissance, with unmistakable prototypes in Arabic geomancies from the late 1st millennium CE on: *ilm al-raml علم الرمل*) the geomantic system in itself can hardly be maintained to be originally Southern African, why should not the attending material apparatus be imported as well? Geomantic dice have been recorded from South Asia, but here the divination system to which they belong is called *ramlaśastra*, in unmistakable recognition of Arabic origin provenance.

In many East Asian temples, pilgrims are invited to conduct a personalised divination using a pair of wooden dice that, like the Southern African ones, are convex on one side

¹¹ Modern (Beijing) reading: bèi; Preclassic Old Chinese: pāts; English meaning: cowry; Karlgren code: 0320 a-e (source: Tower of Babel, 'Chinese characters', at: <http://starling.rinet.ru/cgi-bin/query.cgi?basename=\data\china\bigchina&root=config&morpho=0>).

and that tend to be strung together. E.g. Chau Ju-Kua 趙汝适 ‘s work on the Chinese and Arab trade in the twelfth and thirteen centuries, entitled 諸蕃志 *Chu-fan-chi*.¹²

‘In the eastern part of the city is the Po-chu Tu-kang miao or ‘‘Temple of the ship-captain Tu-kang’’. Whosoever with profound faith prays here for an omen, gets a reply. Passing ships make an offering here before preceeding (farther).



Fig. 4. (a, b, c) South Central African divination tablets; (d, e) Native North American gaming and divining tablets; (e) Chinese temple blocks

Meanwhile, the fact that Southern African *hakata* can hardly be distinguished from gaming and divinatory tablets of Native Americans¹³ may suggests continuities from at least the Upper Palaeolithic. State-of-the-art genetic and comparative mythological

¹² 諸蕃志 *Chu-fan-chi* (tr. and ed. F. Hirth & W.W. Rockhill, St Petersburg 1911 / Tokyo 1914 (Chinese text); second unchanged edition Amsterdam 1966: Oriental Press, speaking (p. 181) on the island of Hainan].

¹³ These connections in relations with cleromantic apparatus are part of a much wider complex of continuities between the historic cultures of sub-Saharan Africa and North America, including: female puberty rites; material culture in such fields as basketry and fishing; the mythical significance of the name ‘Wounded Knee’ (in Southern Africa a major culture hero / demiurge / god). Thorpe (Thorpe, S. A. 1993. *Shamans, Medicine Men and Traditional Healers: A Comparative Study of Shamanism in Siberian Asia, Southern Africa and North America*. Pretoria: University of South Africa) presents the case for the extension of these connection to include shamanic healing – probably far from spurious, and to a considerable extent based on sharing a common substrate culture in Central Asia during the Palaeolithic (elsewhere I argue the close linguistic kinship of Niger-Congo, Austric and Amerind, as distinct from Eurasiatic (including Indo-European), Afro-Asiatic (e.g. Semitic, Berber, Chadic) and Sino-Caucasian; cf. van Binsbergen, *Cluster analysis*, o.c.), but in the light of my present argument probably also due to East Asian overseas cultural transmission in proto-historical and historical times.

research indicates that these connections indeed go back to a common source in Central Asia 30,000-15,000 years BP – it is from here that at least two major demic flows (with inevitable demic diffusion of cultural traits) originate:

- One leading to population of the New World, in various waves, of which the most recent one may have been that producing the Nadene speaking peoples of North America (who, as long-range comparative linguists have argued since the 1980s, belong to the linguistic macrofamily of Dene-Sino-Causasian, stretching from the Gulf of Biscay ie. Basques, via the Caucasus and Tibet/China to North America)
- The other leading west, to West Asia, Europe and back into Africa

1.1.5. Additional evidence

While the above could have given the idea of translating the *Yi Jing* 易經 divinatory approach into wooden tablets, the Chinese material culture of divination offers several other possible prototypes for African divination instruments, e.g. the boards and bowls associated with geomantic divination in Southern and West Africa may derive from Han south-pointing ladles used for divination especially feng shui 風水 (prototype also of nautical compasses – the maritime connection!), and also counting systems involving sticks (origin of the notation system of whole and broken lines in *Yi Jing* 易經 divination – cf. the 16 geomantic symbols similarly constructed – , bronze mirrors used for divinations etc.

An uncanny experience was reported by the British writer on divination D. Farrington Hook:¹⁴ an illiterate diviner she consulted while living in South Africa turned out to be fully aware of the number system that, according to the Chinese Taoist symbolism, was supposed to be associated with the tortoise carapace! Of course there is the obvious risk here that, steeped in Chinese divination, Mrs Hook's perception of the African diviner was tainted by unconscious projection. However, there are similar experiences. The Ndebele (Zimbabwe) diviner Mr Gumede (1928-1992), one of my two teachers of divination and herbalism in Francistown, Botswana (1998-1992) had worked as steward on a South African cruise ship for more than 25 years when the illness announcing his diviner career struck him, and he received his initiation in South Africa; a quarter of a century later I trained with him in Botswana, at the time when my knowledge of Taoism was virtually limited to Needham's account.¹⁵ Only much later could I see the Taoist parallels in Mr Gumede's medical practice and his habitus.

Also the Chinese traditional (Taoist) pharmacopaea, about which we have very detailed descriptions,¹⁶ turns out to display striking parallels with that of diviner-healers in Southern Africa.

¹⁴ Hook, D. Farrington, 1975, *The I Ching and mankind*, London/ Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

¹⁵ Needham, J., in collaboration with Ling, W., 1956, *Science and civilization in China*, Vol. II: History of scientific thought, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

¹⁶ On both topics the literature is too abundant to discuss here. For the Chinese pharmacopaea, cf. Needham, J., Lu Gwei-Djen, & Nathan Sivin 2000, *Science and civilisation in China*, vol. VI part 6, *Medicine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Li, C.P., 1977, 'Chinese herbal medicine: recent experimental studies, clinical applications and pharmacognosy of certain herbs,' in Revolutionary Health Committee of Hunan Province: *A Barefoot Doctor's Manual*, revised edn, Madrona, Seattle, WA, 1977; Jiang, W.Y., 2005, 'Therapeutic wisdom in traditional Chinese medicine: a perspective from modern science', *Trends in*

Further, it is amazing that the Chinese expression *yuye*¹⁷ or *chi zuò* 箕坐, ‘sitting winnowing-basket (箕) fashion, i.e. with one’s legs stretched out’ also exactly conveys the (otherwise exceptional) stance clients of divination are to assume in Southern Africa.¹⁸

Pharmacological Sciences, Trends in Pharmacological Sciences 26, 11: 558-563; Zheng Guili & Zhang Chengbo, 1997, Concise Chinese materia medica, Jinan: Shandong Science and Technology Press; Long Zhixian et al., 2005, eds., The Chinese materia medica, Beijing: Academy Press [Xue Yuan], first published 1998; Read, B., with Li Yü-Thien, 1931, Chinese materia medica: Animal drugs, V Man as a medicine, serial nos. 408-444, Peking Natural History Bulletin, 5 and 6; also separately issued, French Bookstore, Peiping, 1931; Hyatt, R., 1978, Chinese herbal medicine: Ancient art and modern science: Wildwood House, New York: Schocken; and references cited there. An interesting overview, with an abundance of sources and bibliography, is meanwhile offered by: Anonymous, Traditional Chinese medicine, wiki, at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_Chinese_medicine, retrieved 18-12-2010. For the Southern African herbalist’s pharmacopaea, cf.: Ashton, E.H., 1943, Magic, medicine and sorcery among the Southern Sotho, Communications from the School of African Studies, University of Cape Town; Barnard, A., 1979, ‘Nharo Bushman medicine and medicine men’, Africa, 49: 68-79; Blake-Thompson, J., 1931, ‘Native herbal medicines’, NADA (Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual), p. 93; Bourdillon, M.C., 1989, ‘Medicines and symbols’, Zambesia, 16, 1: 29-44; Chavunduka, G., 1994, Traditional Medicine in Modern Zimbabwe. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications; de Zoysa, I., et al., 1984, ‘Perceptions of childhood diarrhoea and its treatment in rural Zimbabwe’, Social Science and Medicine, 19, 7: 727-734; Fako, T.T., 1978, Traditional medicine and organizational issues in Botswana, working paper no. 20, Gaborone: National Institute for Research in Development and African Studies, Documentation Unit; Gelfand, M., 1956, Medicine and magic of the Mashona, Johannesburg: Juta; Gelfand, M., 1964, Witch doctor: Traditional medicine man of Rhodesia, London: Harvill Press; Gilges, W., 1974, Some African Poison Plants and Medicines of Northern Rhodesia. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Hammond-Tooke, W.D., 1989, Rituals and medicines: Indigenous healing in South Africa, Johannesburg: Donker; Hoernlé, A.W., 1937, ‘Magic and medicine’, in: I. Schapera, The Bantu-speaking tribes of South Africa, London: Routledge, pp. 221-245; Hours, B., 1986, ‘African Medicine as an Alibi and as a Reality’, in African Medicine in the Modern World: Proceeds of a Seminar, Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies; Hutchings, A., 1996, Zulu Medicinal Plants: An Inventory, Pietermaritzburg, Natal: University of Natal; Jackson, C.G., 1918, ‘The Medicine man in Natal and Zululand’, South African Journal of Science, 15: 191-204; Mokgosi, B., 1985, ‘Magic and medicine of the Batswapong.’ In Researches on Religion and Tswana Society, pages 122-128. Edited by A. B. T. Byaruhanga - Akiiki Goitsemodimo. Religion in Botswana Project, Volume 10. Gaborone: University of Botswana; Morris, B., 1986, ‘Herbalism and divination in southern Malawi’, Social Science and Medicine, 23, 4: 367-377; Morris, B., 1996, Chewa medical botany: a study of herbalism in Southern Malawi, Berlin / Boston / Munster: LIT; Ngubane, [Sibisi] H., 1977, Body and mind in Zulu medicine: An ethnography of health and disease in Nyuswa-Zulu thought and practice, London/ New York/ San Francisco: Academic Press; Prins, F., 1996a ‘Prohibitions and pollution at a medicinal plant nursery: customary implications associated with ethnobotanical reserves in conservative areas of KwaZulu-Natal.’ Natal Museum Journal of Humanities, 8 (December): 81-93; Staugård, F., 1985, Traditional healers: Traditional medicine in Botswana, Gaborone: Ipelegeng Publishers; Symon, S.A., 1959, ‘Notes on the preparation and uses of African medicine in the Mankoya District, Northern Rhodesia’, in: Rhodes-Livingstone Communication no. 15, Lusaka: Rhodes-Livingstone Institute: 21-77; Thorpe, S. A. 1993, Shamans, Medicine Men and Traditional Healers: A Comparative Study of Shamanism in Siberian Asia, Southern Africa and North America. Pretoria: University of South Africa; van Wyck, B-E, van Oudtshoorn, B., Gericke, N., 1997, Medicinal Plants of Africa, Pretoria: Briza Publications, reprint 2009; Watt, J.M., & N.F. van Warmelo, 1930, ‘The medicines and practice of a Sotho doctor’, Bantu Studies, 4: 47-63.

¹⁷ Or *yuye*; cf. Harper, Donald., 1985, ‘A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B. C.’, Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Vol. 45, No. 2. (Dec., 1985), pp. 459-498.

¹⁸ In view of our discussion of African-Buddhist parallels in the rest of the present argument, this is a remarkable case. In Thai Buddhist, particularly, it is absolutely forbidden to show the soles of one’s feet, let alone to point these towards an object of worship, such as a Buddha image. The *yuye* or *chi tso* stance therefore may be Chinese but not Buddhist – during much of the last two millennia Buddhism was an important expression in China, but it often had to contest with Confucianism and Taoism, and the stance is probably Taoist in the first place (cf. Fig. XX). Equally remarkably, the Thai Buddhist solution is that of

There is nothing in the shape of a winnowing basket that suggests a particular mode of sitting. It may be used while the person wielding it is sitting with his (more typically her) legs stretched out, although this would require the place to be fairly windy; winnowing in a standing position is usually a better strategy: because of friction with the soil, the power of the wind decreases the closer one gets to the ground. The winnowing basket is a standard divining apparatus in China, however, and it is likely that the client sits through the session with legs stretched out — exactly like in Southern Africa.

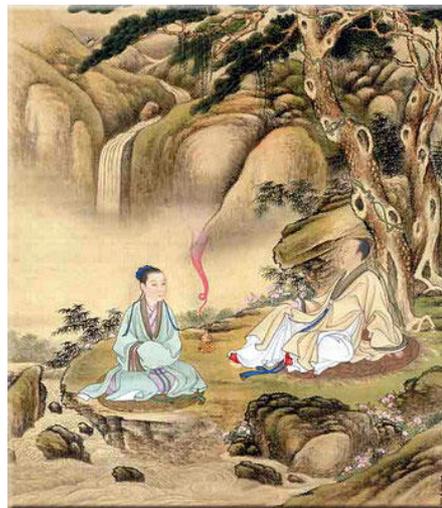


Fig. 5. A Taoist scene showing one person in the standard meditative stance, the other sitting with legs stretched out in front of him.¹⁹

1.2. Discussion

All this suggests the possibility particularly of Chinese borrowing to the West and South in the course of the 1st mill. CE. However, it was in the specific form of *ilm al-raml* that geomantic divination travelled from the Persian Gulf over sea and along the African coastline, via Madagascar and Southern Africa to West Africa – the same route than can also be argued for cowry shells, divination bowls,²⁰ ecstatic cults, and certain types of musical instruments and of boat types.

South Central African court etiquette: squatting or sitting on one's haunches with the legs folded aside in a twisted position.

¹⁹ Courtesy of : http://personaltao.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Taoist_Priest.jpg .

²⁰ Another major form of divination is that of the divining basket (e.g. Rodrigues de Areia, M.L., 1985, *Les symboles divinatoires: Analyse socio-culturelle d'une technique de divination des Cokwe de l'Angola (ngom bo ya cisuka)*, Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra), filled with all sorts of figurines most of which evoke aspects of the concrete reality of the African village and court. The basket is shaken and the selection of figurines that falls out, and the pattern they form on the ground, is interpreted as clues for the problem at hand. The parallel use of vessels for divinatory purposes suggests some kind of genetic relation between the divining bowls and divining baskets, but how? I am inclined to see the baskets as adulterations and localising transformations of the divining bowl, which after all can be argued to have arrived, already with a divinatory function, from a distant transcontinental provenance.



Fig. 6. A Roman coin from the reign of Constantine the Great – similar to the one found in Buea in the 1930s.

The trajectories of artefacts may be capricious and difficult to interpret. Thus, a Roman coin from the time of Emperor Constantine the Great (c. 272-337 CE) was found near Buea, Western Cameroon, in the 1930s.²¹ Although we have been made to expect differently on the basis of the disputed reports of the Phoenician Hanno sailing down the West African coast and probably sighting Mt Cameroon ('the Chariot of the Gods') in the end,²² there is no record of Roman Atlantic trade all the way to Mt Cameroon. Therefore Robert Dick-Read²³ surmises that this coin is one of the large number that found their way to the Indian Ocean, where Roman trade was going through a revival under Constantine, and where (given the extent of Roman trade there) such coins were much in demand. In that case the Buea coin suggests a trajectory that brought probably quite a few other items of culture to West Africa via Madagascar and Southern Africa, e.g. (in the following list I have somewhat added to Dick-Read's own items):

- cowries²⁴ – of monetary value both in China and in Africa –,
- divination bowls and geomantic divination in general (see above),
- ecstatic cults such as *bituma*, *sangoma*, *voodoo* and *bori*, for which an Indian Ocean / South East Asian epicentre of diffusion may be proposed
- Indonesian food crops e.g. taro, banana, cloves²⁵

²¹ Bovill, E.W., 1958, *The golden trade of the Moors*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 41, n.

²² Falconer, Thomas, ed. and tr., 1797, *The Voyage of Hanno: Translated, and accompanied with the Greek text: Explained from the accounts of modern travellers, defended against the objections of Mr Dodwell, and other writers, and illustrated by maps from Ptolemy, d'Anville, and Bougainville*, London: Cadell; Lacroix, W.F.G., 1993, *Afrika in de oudheid: Een linguïstisch-toponymische analyse van Ptolemaeus' kaart van Afrika: Aangevuld met een bespreking van Ofir, Punt en Hanno's reis*, Delft: Eburon; and Herodotus' claim of a circumnavigation of Africa under Pharaoh Necho II, 600 BCE, *Historiae*, IV, 42.

²³ Dick-Read (2005, *The phantom voyagers: Evidence of Indonesian settlement in Africa in ancient times*, Winchester: Thurlton.

²⁴ Cf. Jackson, J.W., 1917, *Shells as evidence of the migrations of early culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press / New York, Longmans, Green, preface by Smith, G. Elliot; Jeffreys, M.D.W., 1938, 'The cowry shell: A study of its history and use in Nigeria', *Nigeria* (Lagos), no. 15: 221-256.

²⁵ Banana can only be transplanted from one region to another through carefully tended living sprouts; therefore the appearance of bananas (originating in New Guinea) in West African sites c. 1000 BCE indicates concrete transcontinental communications. Cloves (originating in Indonesia) were found in roughly the same period in Anatolia (cf. Wright, James C., 1982, 'Excavations at Tsoungiza (Archaia Nemea)', *Hesperia*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1982), pp. 375-397.

- perhaps even trans-Pacific American food crops such as cassava and maize, transmitted via South East Asia; Dick-Read claims (and he is not the only one) that such crops were already available in West Africa before Columbus' crossing of the Atlantic – but rather than the enormous detour via the Pacific, it is more likely that such availability was based on direct pre-Columbian trans-Atlantic communications, such as claimed by Afrocentrists and others²⁶ but largely rejected by mainstream researchers²⁷

And all this far away from the usual Arab trade routes connecting West Africa with West Asia and the Mediterranean.

These East Asian connections may well account for at least some of the material forms of African divination

In all such cases we have at least three explicatory options:

- Coincidence
- Recent historical diffusion (probably from China to Africa, *pace* Afrocentrists like Clyde Winters, who prefer to stress West-East transmission from Africa)
- Common prehistoric origin in the 'Back-to-Africa' movement

Meanwhile, despite the suggestive material in the preceding Figures, and despite the intuitive plausibility that the rational, effective maritime technology of one technologically advanced society (China in the T'ang 唐朝 dynasty and later) is converted into occult apparatus in the far periphery of such a society's sphere of influence, we must not jump to conclusions on the basis of parallels between Chinese and African divinatory apparatuses. Similar parallels could be cited between African material and that from other parts of the Old World, for instance divination bowls from Mesopotamia and Phoenicia (1st mill. BCE-CE) might also be invoked, with the same historical indications that there was actually circumnavigation of Africa in these relatively early times (Hanno). Even the Aegean (i.e. Ancient Greece) and the Central Mediterranean (Etruria) produced artefacts similar to African divination objects in Antiquity, and indeed an earlier vintage of scholars (Frobenius, S. Davis) was inclined to look for explanations in Graeco-Roman Antiquity. Afrocentrists would be inclined to reverse the arrows and see the influences emerging from Africa. And finally, recent discussions initiated by Oppenheimer's Sunda hypothesis²⁸ have introduced another candidate (Indonesians) to be agents of intercontinental diffusion; but also the possibility of an eastbound cultural flow emanating from West Asia and even the Aegean and the Mediterranean at large.

Probably all these monocentric explanations are myopic. The most important point is that there is unmistakable convergence, indicative of a finely-meshed intercontinental network

²⁶ Van Sertima, I., 1976, *They came before Columbus*, New York: Random House; Gordon, Cyrus H., 1971, *Before Columbus: Links between the Old World and Ancient America*. New York: Crown., 1971.

²⁷ Cf. Ortiz de Montellano, Bernard, 2000, ' "Black warrior dynasts": L'afrocentrisme et le Nouveau Monde', in: Fauvelle-Aymar, F.-X., Chrétien, J.-P., & Perrot, C.-H., *Afrocentrismes: L'histoire des Africains entre Égypte et Amérique*, Paris: Karthala, pp. 249-... .

²⁸ Oppenheimer, S.J., 1998, *Eden in the East: The Drowned Continent of Southeast Asia*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson; second impression 2001

of proto-globalisation, and reminding us that Africa has always been an effective part of the wider world.

2. The kingship, the royal orchestra, ceramics and gaming pieces as indicative of Asian-African transcontinental continuities

2.1. Kingship

If, in our consideration of African kingship, we may narrow down our scope to South Central African societies on which I have some expertise, it is true to say that there the kingship in many ways appears in the nature of a foreign imposition, whose details of symbolism, ceremonials, ritual, underlying values are strikingly discontinuous with those of the commoner communities surrounding the royal capitals – even though kings are often recruited from such commoner communities. I have made this point in detail for the Zambian Nkoya.²⁹ In brief, among the Nkoya the commoner communities (whose autochthony during c. two millennia is suggested by archaeological pottery finds) are orientated towards equality, social reciprocity, non-violence, production through agriculture and hunting, some measure of regional trade, and identify with a language that has a long local standing in the region; by contrast, the royal capitals (until the imposition of colonial rule in 1900 CE) were geared towards inequality, the denial of reciprocity, violence, the appropriation of the production of the commoner communities, long-distance trade, and ethnic and linguistic belonging to distant places: the Lunda, the empire of king Mwaat Yaamv³⁰ in Southern Congo. My analysis of these contrasts propelled me into an

²⁹ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2003, 'Then give him to the crocodiles': Violence, state formation, and cultural discontinuity in west central Zambia, 1600-2000', in: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., in collaboration with Pelgrim, R., eds., *The dynamics of power and the rule of law: Essays on Africa and beyond in honour of Emile Adriaan B. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal*, Berlin / Münster / London: LIT, pp. 197-220; also at: http://www.shikanda.net/ethnicity/festschrift_van_binsbergen_crocodiles.pdf and <http://shikanda.net/publications/ASC-1239806-084.pdf>

³⁰ *Mvaat Yaav* (Lunda) means: Lord Death. In Hinduism and Buddhism, Lord Death is a central concept: first recorded in the Vedas, as Yama, this deity is also known as Yamarāja in India and Nepal, Shinje in Tibet, Yamano in South Korea, Yanluowang or simply Yan in China, and Enma Dai-Ō in Japan (Anonymous, 'Yama', wikipedia, at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yama>, retrieved 30 July 2006). In the Asian tradition, he is twinned with the god of love, Kama; I am not aware of some such arrangement in the South Central African context. The ruler of the Lunda capital of Musumba in Southern Congo, Mwaat Yaav is considered to be the overlord of every king within a circle of many hundred of kilometers, in Congo, Angola, Zambia, even Malawi. As such present-day incumbents have played a considerable role in the modern anticolonial, postcolonial, and secessionist politics in the region. One of the striking features of the Mwaat Yaav kingship (and perhaps this is where it got its name from) is that, rather like a Mongolian or Turkish ruler, the incumbent is murdered by his councillors when his term of office is completed – in the Lunda case, he is systematically torn apart. For the Nkoya, the Mwaat Yaav occupies a special place: in their traditions, their kings originally dwelled at the Musumba capital in a state of humiliation (at the pigsties), from which they fled to set up kingdoms of their own, largely dropping the male genital mutilation (*Mukanda*) that was the Mwaat Yaav's prerogative and means of control; the Mwaat Yaav sent his subject Humbu people on a punitive expedition to impose *Mukanda* once more, but Nkoya male royals confronted the Humbu force successfully, and since then have have the privilege of occupying the kingship – which before that time was a female prerogative (van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1992, *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and history in central western Zambia*, London/Boston: Kegan Paul International; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1993, 'Mukanda: Towards a history of circumcision rites in western Zambia, 18th-20th century', in: J.-P. Chrétien, avec collaboration de C.-H.Perrot, G. Prunier & D. Raison-Jourde, eds., *L'invention religieuse en*

examination of the regional and increasingly transregional, even transcontinental, origins of South Central African kingships, which ultimately led to the present transcontinental comparison, because I found that in royal myths and ceremonial many elements were to be found suggestive of a transcontinental, especially Indonesian / Sunda provenance. However, we must realise that the presence of two such fundamentally contrasting socio-cultural modalities in one historical society need not inescapably be interpreted in terms of a foreign origin of one of the modalities. One of the classics of political anthropology in Leach's *Political systems of Highland Burma*,³¹ claiming a similar contrast of overall modalities to inform the socio-political life of another South East Asian society in historical times.

However, Sunda influence need not come from Indonesia³² (although the one uncontested case of such influence in the African context is the people of Madagascar from the Indonesian archipelago, from the beginning of the Common Era onwards). While parallels between Indonesian and South Central African (as well as West African) kingship are considerable, much of the same package can also be found in continental South East Asia. The package includes, in arbitrary order:

- underpinning of the kingship with cosmic symbolism, as the principal connection between Heaven and Earth
- sacred kingship, surrounded by all sorts of prohibitions and requiring public signs of reverence (clapping, squatting, prostration) from all subjects and non-subjects
- royal orchestra with xylophones and hour-glass drums
- other regalia including ceremonial weaponry and sunshades
- fenced royal capitals laid out according to strict, cosmologically-anchored rules; as an aristocratic or royal privilege, the fences have pointed poles, and foundation sacrifices (traditionally human) are associated with the construction of the fence and of the palace
- the king is considered the owner of the land, and identified with the land
- positional succession and perpetual kinship³³

Afrique: Histoire et religion en Afrique noire, Paris: Agence de Culture et de Coopération Technique/Karthala, pp. 49-103; also at: <http://www.shikanda.net/ethnicity/mukanda.htm>). Elsewhere I have tried to read this account in the light of the Israelites' (mythical) Exodus from Egypt, or the Hindu Gypsy's escape from a tyrannical Muslim ruler imposing male genital mutilation c. 1000 CE (van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2010, 'The continuity of African and Eurasian mythologies: General theoretical models, and detailed comparative discussion of the case of Nkoya mythology from Zambia, South Central Africa', in: Wim M.J. van Binsbergen & Eric Venbrux, eds., *New Perspectives on Myth: Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference of the International Association for Comparative Mythology*, Ravenstein (the Netherlands), 19-21 August, 2008), Leiden / Haarlem: Papers in Intercultural Philosophy and Transcontinental Comparative Studies, pp. 143-225, also at: http://www.quest-journal.net/PIP/New_Perspectives_On_Myth_2010/New_Perspectives_on_Myth_Chapter9.pdf) but I fail to see any South East Asian connection here.

³¹ Leach, E.R., 1954, *Political systems of Highland Burma*, London: Athlone.

³² Cf. the equally important question that what looks like Sunda influence in a comparative approach to Africa, may not be Sunda at all, but the result of parallel transmission, both to South East Asia and to sub-Saharan Africa, of a common Neolithic, 'Pelagian' heritage from West to Central Asia. This aspect I discuss elsewhere in the present argument.

³³ These two features (cf. Cunnison, I.G., 1956, 'Perpetual kinship: A political institution of the Luapula peoples', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 20: 28-48; Vansina, J., 1966, *Kingdoms of the savanna*, Madison: Wisconsin University Press; van Binsbergen, 1992, o.c.) are striking in the case of South Central African

- elaborate royal funerary culture
- perhaps as an aspect of the divine / celestial nature of royal persons, they cannot touch the earth but must be carried in a sedan
- slavery and tribute payments are central institutions for the maintenance of the royal court³⁴
- a ceremonial culture of festivals, mostly following an annual calendar, and celebrating the kingship and its relation with celestial and chthonic forces



(a) Funerary sedan for the remains of a princess, c. 1900 CE, one of several in the collection of the National Museum, Bangkok; (b) Use of the sedan on the Lower Congo, late 16th century, after van der Aa (1729); note the sunshade, centre right. The Nkoya collection of oral traditions *Likota Iya Bankoya* describes the journey of a nineteenth-century royal bride to her husband's home in sedan.

Fig. 7. Sedans in Africa and Asia

kingship, but further research needs to confirm my initial and superficial impression that they also obtain in South East Asia.

³⁴ The extent to which these institutions are constitutive of kingship both in Thailand and Western Zambia, may be indicated by the fact that that, In Thailand, the abolition of slavery and corvée services by subjects was only initiated in 1874 shortly after the ascent to the throne of Rama V, and only definitively abolished by that king in 1905. Among the Nkoya and the Lozi / Barotse, slavery and royal corvée were still conspicuous institutions at the turn of the 20th century, and were only definitively abolished by a decree of the Lozi / Barotse king in 1930. Although slavery will be listed in Table 1 as one among many Pelasgian traits, here again I suspect that South East Asian notions of Buddhist kingship did contribute to the development of slavery in South Central Africa, particularly its change from relatively benign, reversible and non-hereditary pawnship, to downright slavery in the form of human chattels available for transcontinental deportation (cf. Douglas, M., 1964, 'Matriliney and pawnship in Central Africa', *Africa*, 24: 301-13; Meillassoux, C., 1991, *The anthropology of slavery: The womb of iron and gold*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Tuden, A., 1958, 'Ila slavery', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 24: 68-78; Lovejoy, P., (ed.), 1983, *Transformation in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; White, C.M.N., 1957, 'Clan, chieftainship and slavery in Luvale political organization', *Africa* 27: 59-75; KOPYTOFF, I., & S. Miers, 1977, *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (1977); Watson, J.L., 1980, ed., *Asian and African systems of slavery*, Oxford: Blackwell; Kopytoff, Igor. 1982. *Slavery*. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 11: 207-30; Tuden, A., 1970, 'Slavery and stratification among the Ila of Central Africa', in: A. Tuden & L. Plotnicov, (eds), *Social Stratification in Africa*, New York/London: The Free Press, 1970, pp. 47-58). However, in connection with this transformation the impact of the transcontinental slave trade must have been far greater than that of Buddhist conceptions of kingship.

In Africa, the kingship has a very wide distribution and considerable continuity between non-Bantu Niger-Congo speaking West Africa to Bantu Niger-Congo speaking Central, East and Southern Africa. Many of its forms have been considered eminently African. However, their ultimate origin remains to be ascertained. Sacred kingship has been on African soil ever since the rise of dynastic rule in Egypt (3100 BCE), and there have undoubtedly been effects – recognised and discussed, exaggerated and denied, in a considerable Africanist literature³⁵ – of historical continuity between Egyptian and sub-Saharan African kingship. At the same time, some of the African forms are so clearly reminiscent of South East Asia, that one wonders whether perhaps Sunda effects may not have added to Egyptian survivals, or even may have, in certain regions, engendered an African political culture of kingship in their own right.

The latter suggestion is predicated on the hypothesis (inspired especially by genetic research but also by occasional archaeological finds such as the Buea Roman coin) that East Asian and South East Asian influence on the African continent has been considerable, from 15 ka BP on but particularly in more recent millennia, and is not limited to the obvious targets of Madagascar and East Africa, but extends to South Central, Southern and (via the Cape of Good Hope) even West Africa. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to hypothesise that the kingship and the Bantu language family in Africa (and perhaps also iron-working)³⁶ have a common history, in which³⁷ West Africa in the late first millennium before the Common Era is a major milestone but which may also involve the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean region.

On a superficial and incidental level one could point to such details as the fact that also Thai royal history records an heroic and martial queen, Somdet Phra Sri Suriyothai, who

³⁵ E.g. Seligman, C.G., 1934, *Egypt and Negro Africa: A study in divine kingship*, London: Routledge; Meyerowitz, E.L.R., 1960, *The divine kingship in Ghana and in Ancient Egypt*, London: Faber and Faber; 231. The Egyptian Origin of a Ram-Headed Breastplate from Lagos G. A. Wainwright Man, Vol. 51, (Oct., 1951), pp. 133-135; Wainwright, G.A., 1949, 'Pharaonic survivals, Lake Chad to the west coast', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 35: 167-175.

³⁶ Cf. Alpern, S.B., 2005, 'Did they or didn't they invent it? Iron in sub-Saharan Africa', *History in Africa*, 2005 32: 41-94; Hromník, C.A., 1981, *Indo-Africa: Towards a new understanding of the history of Sub-Saharan Africa*, Juta: Cape Town.

³⁷ Bantuist specialists (and I cannot count myself among their number) tend to be in agreement that the Bantu family probably emerged in the Lake Chad region c. 8 ka BP. However, such reconstructions are rather arbitrary in that no documentary or archaeological evidence supports them. Puzzlingly, the first possible documentary attestations of Bantu derive from the Mediterranean Bronze Age (van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., & Woudhuizen, Fred C., in press, *Ethnicity in Mediterranean proto-history*, Cambridge: British Archaeology Reports (BAR) International Series, chapter 4). It has now been recognised that attempts to construct a convincing proto-Bantu corpus are jeopardised by the heterogeneity of the family's origin. The Niger-Congo linguistic macrophylum, of which Bantu is a well-known branch, appears to be relatively close to the Austric macrophylum consisting of Austronesian (the languages of insular South East Asia and Oceania with the exception of New Guinea and Australia) and Austroasiatic (the languages of continental South East Asia, e.g. Thai, Khmer), in several ways: with other African languages, and Amerind, Austric languages appear to constitute an early split from the Borean parent body (the latter subsequently developed into Eurasiatic, Afroasiatic and Sino-Caucasian) (van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., in press, *Cluster analysis assessing the relation between the Eurasian, American, African and Oceanian linguistic macro-phyla: On the basis of the distribution of the proposed *Borean reflexes in their respective lexicons: With a lemma exploring *Borean reflexes in Guthrie's Proto-Bantu*, Leiden: Papers in Intercultural Philosophy and Transcontinental Comparative Studies); moreover, some Austric languages (e.g. Thai) have noun classes somewhat comparable to Bantu.

gave her life in battle (1548 CE) in an attempt to save her royal husband. She was roughly contemporary to the martial Nkoya Queen Shikanda and her Angolan counterpart Queen Nzinga – at least, if we have to take seriously the ideas of present-day Nkoya informants (who on the basis of the number of generations claimed to have elapsed since situate Shikanda in the 18th century); however, there is reason to think that Shikanda never was a historical person but a South Asian warrior god (Skanda) transcontinentally localised both in name and in historical situation.³⁸



(a) The memorial *chedi* (reliquary) to Queen Suriyothai, Phra Chedi Sisuriyothai, was built by King Maha Chakkraphat in her honour. The chedi is located at Wat Suanluang Sopsawan at the banks of the Chao Phraya River, southwest of the Wang Luang (Royal Palace) (b) A large statue of the queen riding a war elephant, in a memorial park to her outside of the town of Ayutthaya.

Fig. 8. The Thai Queen Suriyothai, cf. Nkoya Queen Shikanda?

2.2. Musical instruments and the royal orchestra

Another possible Thai-Nkoya correspondence lies in the royal orchestra comprising xylophones and hourglass drums. However, from the material and the informative texts in the instrument room at the Bangkok National Museum, it is clear that xylophones should rather be counted as Javanese instruments, which only around 1800 CE or later were added to the Thai royal musical repertoire. Here, therefore, the link appears to be with insular rather than continental South East Asia, at least as far as the most recent centuries are concerned. Bronze drums have been signs of leadership in South East Asia ever since the Dong Son culture of Northern Vietnam, around the beginning of the Common Era. These drums came in various designs, including a hourglass-type that is strikingly similar the contemporary hourglass drum of the Nkoya kings.

³⁸ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2010, 'The continuity of African and Eurasian mythologies: General theoretical models, and detailed comparative discussion of the case of Nkoya mythology from Zambia, South Central Africa', in: Wim M.J. van Binsbergen & Eric Venbrux, eds., *New Perspectives on Myth: Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference of the International Association for Comparative Mythology*, Ravenstein (the Netherlands), 19-21 August, 2008), Leiden / Haarlem: *Papers in Intercultural Philosophy and Transcontinental Comparative Studies*, pp. 143-225, also at: http://www.quest-journal.net/PIP/New_Perspectives_On_Myth_2010/New_Perspectives_on_Myth_Chapter9.pdf

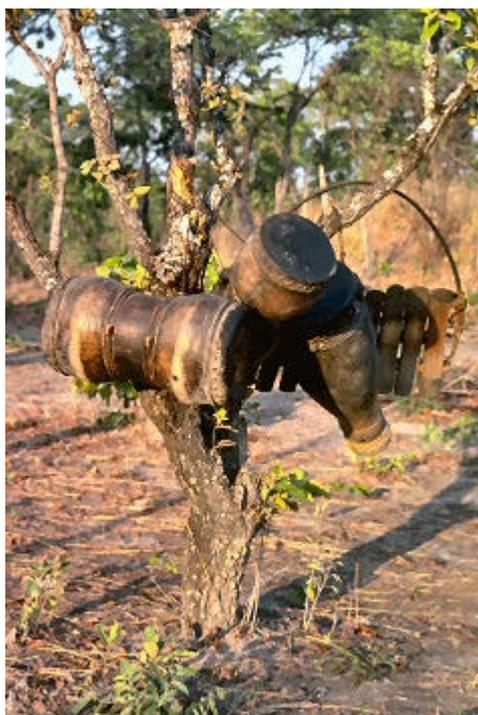


Fig. 9. The royal musical instruments of King Kahare of the Mashasha Nkoya people, Western Central Zambia, including the hourglass drum (foreground centre left) and the xylophone (background right), photographed in a temporary location where the king was tending his wet riverside (matapa) gardens, away from the palace, September 1977.



(a) source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/doremon360/1413925724/sizes/o/in/set-72157602097553987/>; © Doremon360 – with thanks ; (b) <http://baotanglichsu.vn/uploads/image/trongtaynguyen.gif> , with thanks ; (c) Metropolitan Museum of Art – note the frogs, which (besides being a cosmogonic symbol in much of Eurasia including Ancient Egypt), also appear as a mythical royal ancestor among the Nkoya, cf. van Binsbergen 2010 (continuities) o.c. Not the Nkoya hourglass drum (*mukupele*) but other drums in the royal ensemble were recorded to be decorated with the images, not of frogs, but of two reptiles, python (for the male drum) and lizard (for the female drum).

Fig. 10. Drums from the Dong Son culture, Vietnam

In South Central Africa, the royal drums unmistakably feature as palladia: they are the central cymbal of the nation and their kingship, and their capture by enemies is the end of both. The Nkoya compilation of oral traditions *Likota lya Bankoya* contains several discussions to this effect. In his intriguing but all-received study of continuities between

South Central Africa and Ancient Israel, the Swedish theologian, ethnographer and comparativist Harald von Sicard explicitly considers African royal drums as localising transformations of the Israelite palladium, the Ark of the Covenant. Apparently royal drums served a similar function in Thailand during the nineteenth century – and perhaps much earlier.

Meanwhile, in South Central Africa, royal paraphernalia / palladia are not limited to drums and other musical instruments pertaining to the royal orchestra. In addition there is ceremonial ironware, especially weapons including axes, scythes and bows, and ornamental bow stands. Of course, prowess in war and hunting has been a perennial aspect of kingship, from its earliest attestations in the Ancient Near East and Egypt., and therefore the king's ceremonial weapons need not derive from South East Asia at all. However, since there is a strong case for the royal orchestra to derive from there, I would also suggest, not totally without specific grounds,³⁹ that some of the royal weaponry may have such a provenance.

2.3. Ceramics and nautical communications

In South and South East Asia, especially Thailand has been a prolific source of ceramics. Especially during the Sukhothai period (middle of the second millennium CE) North Central Thailand produced beautiful products for an international market.



³⁹ Oppenheimer, S.J., 1998, *Eden in the East: The Drowned Continent of Southeast Asia*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson; second impression 2001, has an argument on extreme Sunda-based similarity of ceremonial axes (as well as neckrings) in Indonesia and Ancient Europe. In general this geneticist's archaeology leaves much to be desired (as does his comparative mythology; cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., with the collaboration of Mark Isaak, 2008, 'Transcontinental mythological patterns in prehistory: A multivariate contents analysis of flood myths worldwide challenges Oppenheimer's claim that the core mythologies of the Ancient Near East and the Bible originate from early Holocene South East Asia', *Cosmos: The Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society*, 23 (2007): 29-80, full text at: http://shikanda.net/ancient_models/Binsbergen_Edinburgh_2007_%20for_Cosmos.pdf). Yet Oppenheimer's argument inspired me to compare the Nkoya king's ceremonial axe (primarily meant for the ritual execution of slaves) with the Indonesian types, and to find similarities in the emphasis on circle-based curves. A display case full of the king's rifles at the National Museum, Bangkok, Thailand, reminded me of King Kahare's fondness of his own collection of rifles, considered major regalia and heirlooms. The same king also boasted a royal bow, which I inherited upon his death as his adopted son. Although the bow is of very different construction from the composite Thai ceremonial bows that have constituted regalia, the mythical and artistic significance of the bow in the South East Asian context as the main attribute of Rama (many dance dramas in this region are based the Ramayana epic) open up another potential Sunda vista. See Fig. XX.



Fig. 11. Specimens of Sawankhalok / Sangkhalok ceramics of the middle of the second millennium CE.

According to some Thai sources⁴⁰ and sweeping passing remarks in the international scholarly literature,⁴¹ some of these ceramics were also exported to Africa, but so far I have not found, in the Africanist literature, specific detailed substantiation of such claims. It would appear as if some types of South East Asian ceramic boxes and plates, as incomparable prestige articles, may have been emulated in wood in South Central Africa, e.g. among the Lozi and Nkoya of Western Zambia.⁴² However, also Ancient Egyptian parallels could be suggested for such South Central African items attested in historical times.

Chinese porcelain has been found in various African prehistoric sites, including Mapungubwe, and Great Zimbabwe:⁴³

⁴⁰ E.g. Fine Arts Department, Office of Archaeology and National Museums, 2002, Guide to the gallery of Thai history: National Museum Bangkok, Bangkok: National Museum Bangkok, p. 76:

‘The significant markets for Sukhothai’s Sangkhaloke wares were Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, India, the Middle East and East African countries’.

⁴¹ E.g. Keith, Donald H., 1987, [Review of] The Excavation of the Pattaya Wreck Site and Survey of Three Other Sites Thailand, 1982 by Jeremy Green; Rosemary Harper, *Historical Archaeology*, 21, 2 (1987), pp. 131-133. No such mention of Africa however in: Tharapong Srisuchart & Surat Lertlum, n.d., *The Sukhothai Ceramic Trading Along the Ocean Silk Road*, PowerPoint presentation, at: http://www.hpcc.nectec.or.th/PNC/presentation/Sukhothai_Ceramic_Trading_Alone_Ocean_Silk.pdf, retrieved 7-12-2010.

⁴² Cf. the way bronze axes were emulated, complete in every detail, in stone in the centuries of transitions from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age throughout Eurasia.

⁴³ Cf. Fouché, L., & G.A. Gardner, 1937-1940, *Mapungubwe: Ancient Bantu civilization on the Limpopo*, Report on excavations at Mapungubwe (northern Transvaal) from February 1933 to June 1935 & 1935-1940, I-II, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Schofield, J.F., 1937, *Mapungubwe: Ancient civilization on the Limpopo*, part iii, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Caton-Thompson, G., 1931, *The Zimbabwe culture: Ruins and reactions*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; facsimile reprint, 1970, New York: Negro Universities Press. For a useful, if perhaps somewhat exaggerated, review of the more recent literature on Great Zimbabwe and its intercontinental trade relations, cf. Fish, W; LF Pitt, J Napoli, N DeBussy, 2001, ‘Its been done before: An archaeological perspective on international marketing’, Curtin Institute of Technology, at: smib.vuw.ac.nz.

‘Imported porcelain, stoneware and glass shards have been found at many excavated sites along the East African Swahili coast, such as the Islamic towns of Manda, Shanga and Gedi on the Kenyan coast and the ruins of the Islamic mosque Malindi on the trade island of Kilwa off the east coast of Tanzania. At all of these sites Chinese ceramic shards were found, together with Islamic wares imported from Iran, Persia and India.^{4–11} Exotic imports, when found in a secondary archaeological context, have always provided a basic archaeological dating method if securely dated at their point of origin. In East Africa, it is of cardinal importance as the only written records of the pre- Portuguese era is the Greek *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (~ 2 AD),⁴⁴ a few travel documents from famous Arab travellers such as Al-Masudi and Ibn Battuta (10th century) and hearsay knowledge documented in Chinese sources. (...) Numerous scholars have used particular varieties of Chinese pottery to refine chronology on the East African coast.^{4–11} Chinese ceramic shards have also been found at inland ancient Iron Age ruins, all of which are situated in a region spanning Zimbabwe, Zambia and the northern part of South Africa, where ancient pre-European gold, copper and tin mines occurred.(...) The known imported ceramics recovered from central African Iron Age sites amount to some 100 shards, of which over 90% come from Great Zimbabwe and are nearly exclusively celadon wares, which broadly dates the shards to pre-Portuguese times.(...) The porcelains traded by the Portuguese, who replaced the Islamic trade along the east coast after 1498, are largely Chinese blue-and-white porcelains and stonewares and were mostly excavated at established Portuguese trading posts.’⁴⁵



Fig. 12. Food bowls in modern Western Zambia (source: Galerie Ezakwantu 2002-2010)

⁴⁴ *Sic*; above I refer to MacDowall’s research (1964) which allowed us to date the Periplus at 110 CE, over a century later.

⁴⁵ Prinsloo, L.C., N Wood, M Loubser, S. Verryn & S. Tiley, 2005, ‘ Re-dating of Chinese celadon shards excavated on Mapungubwe Hill, a 13th century Iron Age site in South Africa, using Raman spectroscopy, XRF and XRD’, *Journal of Raman Spectroscopy*, 36: 806-816, p. 807. Also cf. Esterhuizen, Laura Valerie, 2001, *Dekoratiewe motiewe op Chinese porseleinskerwe uit Portugese skeepswrakke aan die Suid-Afrikaanse kus, 1552-1647 : ’n Kulturhistoriese studie*, DPhil thesis, University of Pretoria; Meyer, A. & Esterhuizen, V., 1994, *Skerwe uit die verlede: handel tussen Mapungubwe and China*. *S. Afr. J. Ethnol.* 17(3):103-108.



(a) Celadon potshards excavated on Mapungubwe hill, Limpopo Province (formerly Transvaal), South Africa. (b) Spouted vessel classified as Southern Song celadon. (source: Prinsloo et al. o.c.: 808 f.)

Fig. 13. Celadon porcelain from Asia in Africa



Fig. 14. Map depicting Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe in geographical context with the important ports and cities of the Islamic trade in the Indian Ocean (after Prinsloo et al. 2005: 807; Sukhothai as provenance of Sankhalok ceramics indicated with star)

As the investigation of sunken vessels from South East Asia has indicated, specifically Thai ships played an important role in the regional trade in these ceramics,⁴⁶ often carrying a mixture of Thai and other ceramic wares, but as yet I am unaware of any Thai vessel attested to venture across the Indian Ocean, before the African coast.

⁴⁶ For specific information on a handful of such ceramics from Thai shipwrecks in the middle of the second millennium CE, see: AntikWest Oriental Art & Antiques, Shipwreck objects, at: <http://www.antikwest.com/asp4/index.asp?stock=Royal%20Nanhai%20-%201>. However, this commercial site is imprecise not to say unreliable: a Thai vessel is claimed to have shipwrecked on its way from Ayuthaya (sic) to Batavia in 1460, although Batavia (the United East India Company's regional headquarters in South East Asia) was only founded by J.P. Coen after the conquest of its predecessor, the town of Jayakarta, in 1619, and named Batavia in 1621; the Batavi, a branch of the Chatti, were an ancient Germanic tribe inhabiting the Netherlands according to Tacitus around the beginning of the Common Era.



Fig. 15. Thai related ceramics from shipwrecks dating from the middle of the second millennium CE (source: AntikWest Oriental Art & Antiques, 2007-2010); note the parallels with the African wooden plates of Fig. 12.



Fig. 16. Some specimens of abbia from Cameroon (average size 3 cm, dictated by the mungongo nutshells from which they are carved)⁴⁷ (top line) compared with (bottom line)

⁴⁷ Remarkably, similar vegetal shells are used in Southern Africa for divination, thus replacing cowries. Mungongo nuts make up an important portion of the diet of San hunter-gatherers. Apparently we hit on an

*gambling pieces from Thailand with strong Chinese influences.*⁴⁸

2.4. Gaming pieces

As I have argued elsewhere,⁴⁹ it is often the highly abstruse, formal items of culture (such as divination systems, notational systems, writing systems) that persist in relatively unaltered, at least recognisable, form across cultural, linguistic and geographical boundaries; and it is often those, therefore, that are our most fruitful 'index fossils' of transcontinental continuities. Gaming pieces in the Ramkhamhaeng Museum, Sukhothai, bear a remarkable similarity with the famous engraved gaming pieces, known as *abbia*, from Cameroon more specifically the Beti / Yaunde people.⁵⁰ Yet, although the assumption of considerable East, South East and South Asian influence on the West African coast is one of the main points of the present argument, it is a very long shot indeed to see such influence in the Cameroonian *abbia* stones.

3. Towards heuristic hypotheses and research strategies

I will now proceed to discuss new or revised hypotheses on African-Asian transcontinental relationships to which the consideration of the South and South East Asian material has been conducive.

3.1. Preliminary considerations: Questioning methodological validity and reliability

Modern ethnography is predicated on the insight that only prolonged and intensive encounter with a local community, supported by the accumulative development of very extensive competence in local cultural and linguistic forms, can produce valid transcultural ethnographic knowledge. Against the background of this dominant paradigm, the present research project is doomed to fail: for an Africanist at the end of his career it is impossible to gather sufficient Asian ethnographic knowledge to competently conduct, on the basis of his personal fieldwork, the kind of very complex comparisons that are required in the present context. Of course, knowledge based on personal local exposure is augmented (as it always is) by library study and feedback from regional specialists, and thus a more or less acceptable compromise may be found for the methodological puzzle outlined here. Also we must remember that other relevant disciplines, such as art history, comparative mythology archaeology, claim to produce knowledge that is often acceptable within their own paradigmatic disciplinary confines, on the basis on very little personal exposure to the

ancient African (or general Old World) cleromantic cultural layer here, which may be influenced in recent centuries by South East Asian models, but does not seem to owe its origins to the latter.

⁴⁸ Source: <http://www.coincoin.com/bAltGambS.jpg>, with thanks; this collection is similar to, but not identical with, the collection of the Ramkhamhaeng Museum, Sukhothai.

⁴⁹ van Binsbergen, 'Rethinking', 1997, o.c.

⁵⁰ Cf. Siegel, M., 1940, *The MacKenzie collection: A Study of West African Carved Gambling Chips*, *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association*, Supplement to *American Anthropologist* 42, 4, Part 2 (1940), number 55, 1940.

field. ‘Multi-sited’, and dubiously short, fieldwork has come in fashion with the rise of neo-diffusionist globalisation studies in the last two decades, and my overall approach in the present project could be somewhat defended under that heading. However, it should be clear that the present research setup can only yield *exploratory* results, and that a multidisciplinary, intercontinental team would be the proper format to approach the present research questions appropriately.

3.2. An heuristic principle: Positive empirical results attained in connection with a very limited research question provide a context in which wider interpretations can be considered more legitimately and confidently

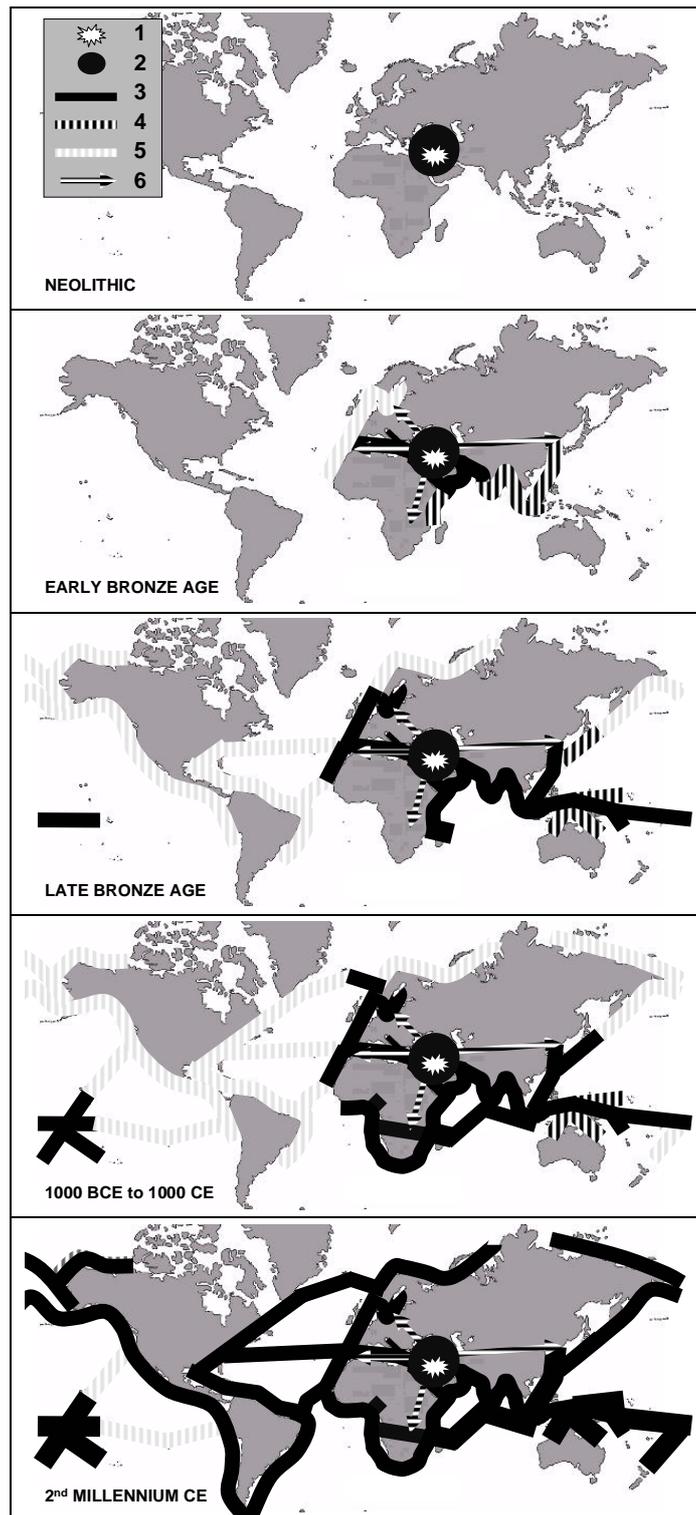
This principle means that we can use the lessons from years of painstaking research into the global history of geomantic divination (as expounded in Section 2 above), and proceed to look at other parts of Asia and Africa, and other items besides divination, and still be sure that what we are pursuing is not evidently a red herring. This is very important, because as yet the study of Asian-African intercontinental continuities is rather counter-paradigmatic. Most Africanists are still adopting the stance, hailing from the early years of African postcolonial independence, that all things African have to be explained by exclusive reference to an African framework – and any deviation from this rule will be frowned upon as a, politically incorrect, North Atlantic hegemonic attempt to deprive Africa and African from their true history and identity. (By the same principle, Old Testament Studies would be anathema because they imply that Christianity as one of the hallmarks of North Atlantic culture, is not originally European, but Asian...)

What seems to be at stake is not so much a reconsideration of the gives and takes of Africa’s place in cultural prehistory and protohistory, but a deconstruction of the very notion of Africa as a valid and inescapable category in the study of the global cultural past.⁵¹ Africa is more than anything else, a recent geopolitical construct reflecting the perceptions and interests prevailing in the North Atlantic – even though Africans and African Americans have in the meantime adopted the notion of Africa as the expression of their innermost identity.

3.3. A crucial question: From long-distance trade in artefacts to cultural transmission

In this type of research we run into the difficulty that the connection between transcontinental trade, and the transcontinental flow of ideas including religious representations, is far from obvious. Although over half of Africa is now at least nominally Islamic (but usually far more committed than just ‘nominally’), for over a thousand years Islam, and the literacy and secret sciences (divination etc.) that accompanied it, were largely confined to royal courts, where also Islamic styles of justice, dress, recreation,
(cont. two pages down)

⁵¹ Cf. Mudimbe, V.Y., 1988, *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press/London: Currey; Mudimbe, V.Y., 1994, *The Idea of Africa*, Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997c, ‘Rethinking Africa’s contribution to global cultural history: Lessons from a comparative historical analysis of mankala board-games and geomantic divination’, in: van Binsbergen 1997a, pp. 221-254.



1. Proposed origin; 2. Initial expansion of 1; 3. Extent of (semi-)maritime network; 4 . idem, putative; 5. idem, highly conjectural; 6. The 'cross-model': expansion of Pelasgian traits (largely overland)

Fig. 17. Proposed emergence of a global maritime network since the Neolithic

(cont. from two pages up)

gamesmanship etc. would obtain. Thus we are used to picture the court of Monomotapa, the great ruler of Zimbabwe, as Arabian in appearance, with Arabian dress codes etc. In fact, the court that condemned Father Silveira to death, the first Christian missionary to Zimbabwe, the mid-16th century,⁵² ascertained his guilt with the use of the four-tablet oracle that goes back to Islamic texts the late first and early second millennium of the Common Era – probably the judges were literate Muslims. However, the archaeological impact of such local presence of priests at courts is so minimal that, unless they leave or stimulate documentary attestations, they risk to be entirely overlooked by history – and the same would apply if these resident priests were not Islamic, but Hinduist or Buddhist. Thus, despite the availability of documentary evidence concerning Silveira's fate, the oldest archaeological attestaton of the four-tablet divinatory system that sent him to his death is from 100 years later.⁵³ The suggestion of a Hinduist / Buddhist presence at African courts and trading centres, both in East Africa and in West Africa, therefore deserves to be made even though to date it can mainly be supported by mere circumstantial evidence. Perhaps we may even go one step further and suggest that parts of South Central and Southern Africa were inhabited, in protohistorical times (which in that part of the world only ended in the 18th century), by South and South East Asians – the Tauchmann hypothesis.

3.4. Towards the idea of a multidirectional maritime global transcontinental network since the Bronze Age

In the following Fig. 17 (previous page) I present, on the basis of my research in progress, the outlines of a transcontinental maritime network that has been developing between the Indian, Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Oceans since the Neolithic. The evidence on which this figure is based cannot itself be presented here,⁵⁴ although part of it is already offered in passing in the present argument.

Now if we stretch the curved actual routes into schematic straight lines, the result would be something like in the following diagram:

⁵² dos Santos, J., 1901, Ethiopia oriental, and Eastern Ethiopia, in: Theal, G.M., ed., Records of South Eastern Africa, Cape Town: Government of the Cape Colony, vol vii, pp. 1-182 [reprint of the original edition of 1609], 183-383 [English translation] .

⁵³ Robinson, K.R., 1959, Khami ruins: Report on excavations undertaken for the commission for the preservation of natural and historical monuments and relics, Southern Rhodesia, 1947-1955, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁴ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., in preparation (a), Out of Africa or out of Sundaland: Mythical discourse in global perspective; cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2007, 'Out of Sundaland? A constructive assessment of Oppenheimer's thesis claiming decisive Indonesian prehistoric cultural influence on West Asia, Africa and Europe, specifically on the core mythologies of the Ancient Near East and the Bible', paper read at the 1st Annual Conference of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK, 28-30 August 2007, under the title 'The Deep History of Stories'; convenor Emily Lyle for The Traditional Cosmology Society, Edinburgh, and Michael Witzel for the International Association for Comparative Mythology; original presentation: http://www.shikanda.net/topicalities/edinburgh_best_web/edinburgh_BEST_files/frame.htm ; further details at: http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/edinburgh.htm . As these texts bring out, there is considerable genetic support for the lines of continuity sketched in the diagram, including those across the African continent.

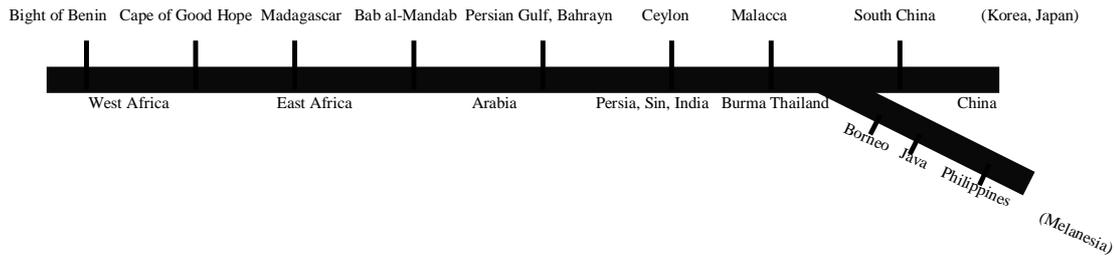


Fig. 18. Schematic representation of the proposed transcontinental maritime network since the Bronze Age.

Here the discrete nature of the three continents of the Old World – so constitutive of the Eurocentric worldview ever since Early Modern times – largely dissolves into a continuum stretching from the (African) Gold Coast in the West to the Malaccan Peninsula, where it bifurcates into a Southern branch going to Indonesia, the Philippines, even Melanesia; and a Northern branch reaching to South China, ultimately Korea and Japan. Interestingly, the multiple use of the same toponym for parts of this maritime system suggests its unity. Thus the concept of ‘Gold Land’ is used not only for Sumatra, Zimbabwe (off the East African coast) and Ghana, but the toponyms

‘Suvarnabhumi (Sanskrit) or Suvannabhumi (Pali) meaning the "Golden Land" or "Land of Gold", is a term coined by the ancient Indians which refers broadly to Lower Burma, Lower Thailand, Lower Malay Peninsula, the Sumatra, but more generally accepted to refer more specifically to Lower Burma’⁵⁵

The relevance of this schema for our present overall argument becomes apparent once we inscribe in it (Fig. 19) the distribution of the three world religions Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. For Islam the situation is straightforward and contested: on the strength of the proposed maritime network aided also by overland communications, it spread from the second half of the first millennium both Eastward and Southward to cover a considerable part of our coastal continuum, from East Africa to Indonesia. (Of course, Islam has also massively expanded into Central Asia and even West China, but this was not due to maritime contacts and will be left out of consideration here.) However, Indonesian history has potential lessons for our reading of the African, Western end of our maritime continuum. In Indonesia, Islam was the last world religion to arrive, supplanting Hinduism and Buddhism, which reached Indonesia in the early first millennium, and were dominant up to the early second millennium. Given the expansion of our continuum in two directions, both East and West, is it not plausible that also the two earlier world religions, whose powers of expansion in an Eastern direction have been so manifested, also expanded, to some extent, in the Westerly direction, towards Arabia, East Africa, and ultimately West Africa?

⁵⁵ Anonymous, Suvarnabhumi, wiki, at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suvarnabhumi> [sic], retrieved 8-12-2010, with extensive sources. Other toponyms of multiple use throughout this extended maritime system include Libya, Pu(n), Havila and Kush, cf. Karst, J., 1931a, *Origines Mediterraneae: Die vorgeschichtlichen Mittelmeervölker nach Ursprung, Schichtung und Verwandtschaft: Ethnologisch-linguistische Forschungen über Euskaldenak (Urbasken), Alarodier und Proto-Phrygen, Pyrenaeo-Kaukasier und Atlanto-Ligurer, West- und Ostiberer, Liguro-Leleger, Etrusker und Pelasger, Tyrrhener, Lyder und Hetiter*, Heidelberg: Winters.

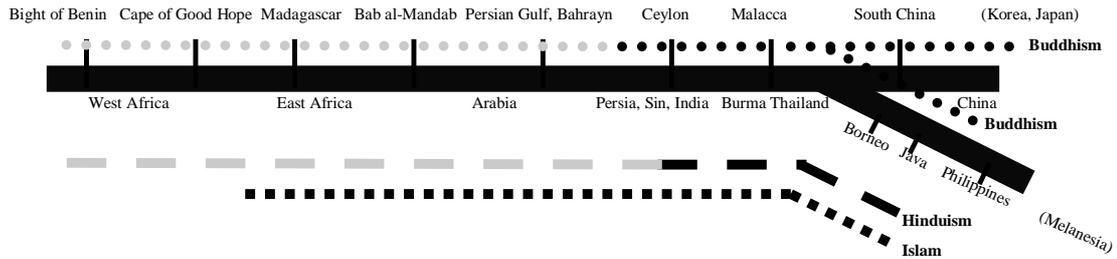


Fig. 19. Schematic representation of the distribution of three world religions (Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism) along the proposed transcontinental maritime network

In Fig. 19, I have indicated with grey broken en dotted lines what *formally* the implications of such an hypothesis of Westerly expansion of Hinduism and Buddhism would be: Westerly expansion West of the Indian subcontinent to Arabia, East Africa and West Africa. Probably, in the reconstruction of this , so far purely hypothetical, dynamics a greater distinction must be made between Hinduism and Buddhism than is necessary in the case of Indonesia.⁵⁶ But the mechanisms of their spread in South East Asia might very well have operated in the western part of our proposed maritime system as well: traders and priests who settle at pre-existing princely and royal courts and come to represent there a distant Great Tradition, that enhances the original legitimacy of local rulers, while subsequently that legitimacy is being redefined in terms of the imported world religion: the imported priestly class designs dynastic genealogies and links them up to their world religion's pantheon, and applies notions of kingship, festivals, royal orchestra, chronicles, epics, court organisation and protocol, to the local scene – after which the imported world religion more or less seeps through to the commoner classes as a selective and adulterated enhancement of their pre-existing popular religion, which by and large survives as a powerful substrate and which is largely continuous with the rest of the Old World.⁵⁷

3.5. Identifying specific possibly South Asian / South East Asian components in African culture

3.5.1. Before Islam, Buddhist (and Hinduist) influence on sub-Saharan Africa?

Islam has come to stay in Africa, and we are accustomed to acknowledge the great impact of that world religion in African history and proto-history. Any influence from Hinduism and Buddhism on sub-Saharan Africa is far less recognised, and if acknowledged at all, it

⁵⁶ However, the distinction between Buddhism and Hinduism cannot always be made. All major Hindu deities were incorporated into Buddhism as subservient to the Buddha, and thus they frequently appear in a Buddhist context. Several Thai temples (including Wat Pho in Bangkok and Wat Sri Sawai in Old Sukhothai) show evidence of the cult of Shiwa (with representations of the lingam as the male principle, and its counterpart the yoni). Interestingly, a large number of objects qualifying as a lingam was exscavated by Bent in Great Zimbabwe (Bent, o.c., p. 188, with one image). The yoni counterpart was also in evidence there, cf. Fig. XX.

⁵⁷ Such a model is presented, succinctly but authoritatively, in: Goris, R., & Dronkers, P.L., n.d. [1950] , *Bali: Atlas kebudajaan: Cults and customs: Cultuurgeschiedenis in beeld*, Jakarta: Government of the Republic of Indonesia.

tends to be only in the context of East Africa.⁵⁸ Yet, considering that major states and cultural complexes in South, South East and East Asia have been dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism for many centuries, and that there has been very considerable and recognised maritime contact between East Africa and these Asian regions, it is almost certain that at some stage Africa underwent the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism – already prior to the last few centuries, when many Indians came to East and Southern Africa, initially in the context of indentured labour hired in the late nineteenth century. That Buddhism reached East Africa is clear from the existence of an Ethiopic account of the Buddha and the Boddhisatva.⁵⁹ There is also Z.P. Thundy’s suggestion that the sect of the *Therapeutae* in Egypt around the beginning of the Common Era was named after the Theravada variety of Buddhism, which has persisted in Sri Lanka and continental South East Asia including Thailand.⁶⁰



(a, b) *linga* (Bent 1969: 188) and *yoni* (Bent 1969: 202), Great Zimbabwe; (c) *linga* and *yoni* from Sukhothai medieval city, at Ramkhamhaeng Museum, Old Sukhothai; (d) *linga* at the Wat Pho temple, Bangkok; (e) *yoni* at the Wat Sri Sawai, Old Sukhothai. Note that the distinctive feature of the *yoni* shape is a circular shape with central hole connected with the object’s outer rim through a straight groove – an abstraction of

⁵⁸ Cf. Chittick, H.N., & Rotberg, R.I., 1975, eds., *East Africa and the Orient: Cultural syntheses in pre-colonial times*, New York: Africana Publishing Co.

⁵⁹ Cf. Budge, E.A. Wallis, 1923, *Beralâm and Yêwâsêf: Being the Ethiopic version of a Christianized recension of the Buddhist legend of the Buddha and the Boddhisattva*, the Ethiopic text edited for the first time with an English translation and introduction, I-II, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Also see: Lang, D. M., 1957, ‘The Life of the Blessed Iodasaph: A New Oriental Christian Version of the Barlaam and Ioasaph Romance (Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchal Library: Georgian MS 140)’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 20, No. 1/3, *Studies in Honour of Sir Ralph Turner*, Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 1937-57 (1957), pp. 389-40.

⁶⁰ Thundy, Z.P., 1993, *Buddha and Christ: Nativity stories and Indian traditions*, Leiden: Brill, p. 245.

female genital anatomy. While here depicted from Buddhist contexts, the *linga-yoni* symbolism is also ubiquitously represented especially in Hinduist contexts all over South Asia.

Fig. 20. Evidence of the Shiva cult from Thailand and from Great Zimbabwe



Fig. 21. The Great Zimbabwe enclosure with the conical tower. The complex dates from the 11th tot the 14th century CE.⁶¹



Fig. 22. (a) Prangs in the Wat Arung temple, Bangkok; (b) prang and chedis at the royal temple and palace complex, Bangkok (c, d) idem at Ayutthaya

⁶¹ A similar Buddhist background to Great Zimbabwe was already proposed by: Hornell, J., 1934, 'Indonesian influences on east African culture', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 64: 305-332 + plates. Of course, I realise that it is politically highly incorrect to doubt the exclusively and primordially African origin of the Great Zimbabwe complex. From c. 1930 (cf. Caton-Tompson 1931, o.c.) much scholarship has been invested to refute the earlier suggestions (by Bent, MacIver etc.) as to the non-African (Phoenician, Sabaean, Sardinian etc.) origin of the site, whose most striking archaeological features, however, have hardly any counterparts in sub-Saharan Africa. However, throughout my transcontinental research I have taken the position that it is better to acknowledge Africa as an integral part of global cultural history also in the more recent millennia, than to create an artificial niche for it impervious (unlike the rest of the world) for transcontinental influence.

3.5.2. Granting the possibility of Hinduist and Buddhist influences in addition to the well-acknowledged Islamic ones, what kind of attestations of possibly transcontinental continuities might we expect to find in sub-Saharan Africa?⁶²

- Hinduist / Buddhist *chedis* / *stupas* / reliquaries (cf. Great Zimbabwe, above)
- Hinduist / Buddhist temples (cf. ecstatic cultic lodges and vodun temples in East, Southern and West Africa, especially considering the gaudy colours, bric-a-brac piling up of heterogeneous elements often of an anthropomorphic nature) of Asian reminiscence
- Hinduist / Buddhist ritual (cf. remnants of ritual in the West African *vodun* cult, and in South Central and Southern African cults like *sangoma*,⁶³ *bituma*⁶⁴ (venerating a lotus!) and other ecstatic / trance / healing cults in other words cults of affliction

⁶² I regret that in the present version of this analysis, the suggestion emerges that, despite the multidirectional nature of the proposed intercontinental maritime system, the direction of cultural borrowing in protohistorical and historical times has been mainly from East to West, i.e. from East, South East and South Asia, to sub-Saharan Africa. Frankly, I have little evidence at my disposal to illustrate the reverse process. A particular type of cattle, and certain foodcrops including sesame (Darlington, C.D., 1969, *The evolution of man and society*, London: Allen & Unwin, second impr.) crossed from Africa to Asia in Neolithic times. In the Common Era, slavery brought so many Africans especially to East Asia, that under the T'ang dynasty (618-908 CE) a Black trickster hero came to constitute a genre of its own in classical Chinese literature (Irwin, G.W., 1977, *Africans Abroad: A documentary history of the Black diaspora in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean during the age of slavery*, New York: Columbia University Press.) The distribution of *mankala* (a major family of board games often considered as proverbially African (cf. Culin, S., 1896, 'Mankala, the national game of Africa', in: The Director, ed., *US National Museum Annual Report*, Washington: United States National Museum, pp. 595-607) in South India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia (cf. Barnes, R.H., 1975, *Mancala in Kedang: A structural test*, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 131, 1: 67-85) might be attributed to African influence in Early Modern times, when African moved East not only as slaves but also as soldiers. In Indonesia and Sri Lanka this gave rise to culturally distinct small minorities, with their own musical and dancing repertoires. All this is peanuts as against the claims of the Afrocentrist educationalist and linguist Clyde Winters, who has extensively published on what he sees as African influences on Asia in the same period: Winters, C.A., 1979, 'Trade between East Africa and China', *Afrikan Mwalimu*, (January 1979) pages 25-31; Winters, C.A., 1980, 'Are Dravidians of African Origin', *P[roceedings] Second ISAS [International Symposium on Asian Studies]*, 1980, (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1981b) pages 789- 807; Winters, C.A., 1983, 'Blacks in Ancient China, Part 1: The Founders of Xia and Shang', *Journal of Black Studies* 1, no 2 (1983c); Winters, C.A., , 1983, 'Possible Relationship between the Manding and Japanese', *Papers in Japanese Linguistics* ix, (1983d) pages 151-158; Winters, C.A., 1988, 'The Dravidian and Manding Substratum in Tokharian', *Central Asiatic Journal* 32, nos 1-2, (1988) pages 131-141.

⁶³ The South Asian, Hinduist / Buddhist elements in the *sangoma* cult of Southern Africa I have explored (as a long-standing initiate and officiant of that cult), in a number of papers mentioned elsewhere in the present argument

⁶⁴ *Bituma* was the first ecstatic cult I studied in South Central Africa (van Binsbergen 1981, o.c.). Its founder, Shimbinga, hailed from Angola and propagated the veneration of the white waterlily, in other words of the lotus; the main other features of his cult were a debarked forked pole hung with strings of white beads, white robes, nocturnal ecstatic healing sessions with drum orchestra and chorus, a song 'We are going to the moon', and food taboos especially concerning the first fruits of originally alien food crops such as cassava and maize. Although the lotus was also venerated in Ancient Egypt as a cosmogonic symbol, its main associations are Buddhist. In East Asia, the White Lotus cult was an element of conflict and rebellion through much of the last two millennia, and given the extensive intercontinental communications during most of that period it is not unthinkable that expelled representatives of this cult, or of its offshoots, ended up in Angola. Given the widespread and powerful symbolism of the lotus, and the syncretic tendencies of West African ecstatic religion ('vodun'), it is quite likely that further research will reveal more connections.

- Hinduist / Buddhist priests (there are indications that priests / cultic leaders in African cults of affliction / ecstatic cults in historic times may well be considered localised transformations of a Hinduist / Buddhist priestly model; the same transformation may even be applied to African kings, who in several ways (e.g. food taboos, burial practices) are reminiscent of South Asian Brahmins).
- Hinduist / Buddhist doctrine⁶⁵ (cf. general belief in reincarnation, especially in South Central Africa, and in kingship as reinforced by some sort of Great Tradition in the background – which also lends the authority to divination practices. Can we really maintain that (much as in rural and peripheral regions, and social classes, of South, South East and East Africa, according to an old debate),⁶⁶ Buddhist, in addition to Hinduism and especially Islam (which so far has attracted most of the attention of scholars in the African transcontinental context), may have formed a legitimating distant reference point, and as such A Great Tradition, even in pre-colonial Africa of the 2nd millennium CE? It is clear that the actual teachings of Theravada Buddhism such as practiced in continental South East Asia (Thailand, Myanmar) and Sri Lanka did not leave many conspicuous traces on South Central African culture, strong enough to be detected in cultural and ritual patterns surviving into historical times, but there may be more than meets the eye.⁶⁷
- Hinduist / Buddhist priests legitimating royal claims by genealogies and dynastic constructs, yet still streamlining effects on pre-existing traditions of kingship, apparently inspired by South, South East and East Asian models of rulership; let me mention one example (more will become manifest throughout the present argument): one of the amazing facts of Nkoya oral traditions⁶⁸ is that the names of

⁶⁵ Even where there is a considerable discrepancy between the spirituality and doctrine of religious specialists, and the folk religion of the masses, the signature of a world religion tends to be reflected in practical matters such as food and drink. In Africa, abstinence from pork and compliance with the practice of male genital mutilation are signs of Muslim identity even when actual practices and beliefs in the field of ritual veneration, compliance with the five pillars of Islam, and alcohol consumption, may deviate from official, formal Islam. In Buddhism, reincarnation beliefs imply respect for non-human life as potentially housing reincarnated human souls, hence abstinence from killing animals and from meat consumption. I am not aware of similar practices in sub-Saharan Africa which could be indicative of Buddhist influence; however, in this connection it is reassuring that also in present-day Thailand, vegetarianism is very much a minority option. It combines there with a no-nonsense approach to food – in ordinary life, many meals appear to be prepared and consumed in passing, without the social and ritual elaboration that has become the pattern of North Atlantic middle-class culture, and which seems to puzzle Thai. One must be careful with generalisations based on a few weeks of fieldwork, but if my generalisation on this point is somewhat valid, this condition might reflect not just a historical trend in South East Asian continental culture but a specific application of Buddhist principle of rejecting the world of the senses. I have found attitudes towards food in rural South Central and Southern Africa similar to the Thai stance, and perhaps this is a reflection of a diffuse Buddhist influence.

⁶⁶ Obeyesekere, Gananath, 1963, 'The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 22, 2: 139-153; Redfield, Robert, 1955, 'The Social Organization of Tradition', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 15, 1: 13-21; Redfield, R., 1956, *Peasant society and culture: An anthropological approach to civilisation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Srinivas, M.N., 1956, 'A note on Sanskritization and Westernization', *Far Eastern Quarterly*, 15: 481-496.

⁶⁷ Thus I have recently suggested that the Vedic, subsequently Buddhist homa fire ritual could be such an influence, but it seems to belong to outside the circle of Theravada; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2010, 'Note on South and East Asian fire ritual, and the Southern African sangoma cult', at: <http://www.shikanda.net/topicalities/topicali.htm> (entry for October 2010).

⁶⁸ van Binsbergen 1992 o.c.; Anonymous [J.M. Shimunika], n.d., Muhumpu wa byambo bya mwaka - Nkoya, s.l. [Luampa, Mankoya]: s.n. [South African General Mission] ; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1988,

kings appear there grouped by dynasties and each furnished with a serial number: Mwene Manenga I, Mwene Manenga II, Kahare III, etc. Much like the amazing systematics of the hakata divination system (see Section 2 above), this suggests dynastic notions managed by a literate elite – and while it would be possible that this literate elite must be sought in twentieth-century recorders of these traditions (Rev. Shimunika and his associations), it is more likely that here we encounter traces of a royal tradition that has been indirectly indebted to Hinduism and Buddhism.⁶⁹ I also have the impression that Nkoya oral traditions, including the lengthy *Likota Iya Bankoya*,⁷⁰ have been predicated on South Asian literate models.

- not in the first place Hinduist / Buddhist ritual paraphernalia – yet beaded scapulars, necklaces and bracelets, although of a near-global distribution going back to very ancient times, may in some of their particular African manifestations (e.g. in the Southern African sangoma cult) be indebted to Asian prototypes.
- not in the first place Hinduist / Buddhist ritual and ceremonial gestures that are out of touch with the local commoner repertoire (cf. stave, black or white robes, specific prayer and respect stances)
- not in the first place Hinduist / Buddhist ritual practices of everyday life, such as divination; the continuities in this field between South, South East and East Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, have been the subject of sustained research since 1990, and have been reported in Section 2.
- not in the first place Hinduist / Buddhist notions of caste hierarchy (a Hindu rather than Buddhist feature); however, in my accounts of the Southern African sangoma cult a rudimentary caste distinction, and selective emphasis and ritual elaboration of the *kshatriya* warrior caste, is unmistakable, for which even a textual basis can be found in South Asian writings⁷¹

ed., J. Shimunika's *Likota Iya Bankoya*: Nkoya version, Research report No. 31B, Leiden: African Studies Centre.

⁶⁹ A perusal of classic Asian texts on kingship, such as the Hinduist *Arthashastra* or the Buddhist text *Kamandakiya Nitisa* (Kandamaka & Dutt 1896), might yield further clues as to the extent, and the limitations, to which sub-Saharan African kingships are indebted to literate models and actual state practices from Asia; Rangarajan, L.N., 1992, tr. & ed., Kautila: *The Arthashastra*: Edited, rearranged, translated and introduced, Harmondsworth: Penguin, first published 1987.

E.g. the Buddhist text *Kamandakiya Nitisa* and the Hindu text *Arthashastra* by Kautila

⁷⁰ Presented and analysed in: Van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1992, *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and history in western central Zambia*, London/ Boston: Kegan Paul International; also at: <http://www.shikanda.net/ethnicity/Tearsweb/pdftears.htm> .

⁷¹ Cf. van Binsbergen 2003, o.c., p. 310 f; Jolly, J., 1988a, ed., 'Institutes of Vishnu', in: Müller, F.M., and Jolly, J., eds., *Sacred Books of the East*: Translated by various oriental scholars, vol. 7, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass; first published in 1880-1910, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 115.



A leading monk at the monastery adjacent to Wat Pho dispensing blessing and a bracelet of strung beads, in exchange for a standard payment of Thai bhat 1000 (ca. € 25). Bracelets of strung beads have been a general feature of Old World life since the Upper Palaeolithic, and their prevalence in present-day Africa therefore cannot simply be claimed as a Asian trait. However, the context (initiation into a cult administered by a localised organisation, a lodge, reminiscent of its ashram or monastic counterpart in South, South East and East Asia), suggests that here again we have a case similar to the several cases listed in Table 2: ‘pre-existing African forms due to common substrate, probably rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism’.

Fig. 23. Bracelets as sacrificial trophies (in more than one sense!)

- the Mbedzi / Mbutsi figure throughout Southern West Africa: In Southern Africa the name Mbedzi appears as the widespread honorific title of cult leaders, as the name of a clan with connotations of sacredness and the colour white, whose boast name stresses their custom of second burial (a custom also found in Africa among the Nigerian Igbo and Cameroonian Bamileke whose Sunda connotations I have argued elsewhere notably van Binsbergen 2006, Cameroon, o.c., but which is primarily known from South East Asia notably Borneo), and which Frobenius (Eyrthraea, 1931, o.c.) associates with ‘an ancient East Asian kingdom in Southern Africa’. The name also occurs in the Douala region, Cameroon, as the name of an apical ancestor associated with the cult of the sea and its annual festival.⁷² Although in various South Bantu languages the name may mean ‘Moon’, which opens up all sorts of mythical connotations devoid of historical significance, I proposed (2003) that the reference is in the first place to the Buddha, who in some

⁷² It is also at Douala that elaborate, ornate ship’s bows are found that I am inclined to read (much like the sculptural traditions in the ornamentation of Grass Fields royal courts) as evidence of South East Asian influence. There is genetic support for this idea, the details of which I have set out elsewhere: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2010, ‘South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa: Transcontinental explorations inspired by an Africanist’s recent trip to South East Asia’, at: <http://www.shikanda.net/topicalities/BornoBali2010final.pdf>; also cf. Oppenheimer 1998, o.c.

East and South Asian contexts is referred to as *Butsi*, which in Bantu-speaking mouth would easily become Mbutzi. So far Frobenius' suggestion as to an East Asian kingdom in Southern Africa has not been taken seriously in the international literature,⁷³ but against the evidence brought together in the present argument, both Great Zimbabwe and Mapungubwe appear serious candidates, and their association with the name Mbutzi seems to support my suggestions that, at one stage prior to the ascendance of the Arabs in Southeastern Africa, this kingdom would have had a Buddhist signature. I also suspect that the Lunda region (Fig. 24) where also many South and South East Asian traits can be spotted (the Nkoya constitute the Lunda's Southern fringe) qualifies as another Hinduist / Buddhist influence area, perhaps even as originally a Hinduist / Buddhist state. This would be an excellent explanation for the fact that Buddhist influences in sub-Saharan Africa seem particularly concentrated in the institutional domain of the kingship,⁷⁴ – even though of course for such a major and complex institution no one-factor explanation is possible, and especially the trans-Saharan influence from the Ancient Near East and Ancient Egypt must be recognised as another factor in its own right. A major Buddhist / Hinduist state in Southern Africa during the 11th-15th century CE would be a credible epicentre for the transmission, throughout Southern and South Central Africa but with effective extensions into West Africa, of a South-East-Asian-inspired culture of kingship, royal ceremonial culture including orchestra, regalia and boat pageants, – and beyond even the geographical extent of precolonial statal rule, an epicentre for diffuse localising transformations of Buddhism / Hinduism, notably in the form of ecstatic cults. Much of what has remained inexplicable in African kingship and religion on the basis of recognised sub-Saharan African traditions, even if enriched with the undeniable cultural transmission from Egypt during three millennia, suddenly appears in a new light when we take seriously the proposed existence of a Southern African Buddhist-Hinduist state in the first half of the second millennium CE.

- Below I will briefly indicate the cult of the sea and its many transformations and ramifications in the direction of lesser water deities, naiads, river deities, etc. Here again, ancient African traditions may have come to be transformed by Asian influences – yielding, for instance, the Mami Wati complex of West Africa, or the 'sacred pool' complex (intimately associated with the Mbedzi name) in Southern Africa. In a recent study of a Nkoya statuette associated with the Bituma ecstatic cult (van Binsbergen 2012), the prominence and transcontinental connections of aquatic and serpentine spirits are further highlighted. Perhaps this is the place to introduce another promising theme for Asian-African continuities: that of the

⁷³ In recent decades there has been a general discrediting of the figure of Frobenius, for complex and partially valid reasons (Oedipal tendencies on the part of later generations of Africanists in Germany; Frobenius infringement of present-day codes of professional conduct in transcultural fieldwork; his impact on Afrocentrism) into merits I cannot go now. Let it suffice to say that both Richard Fardon, as a prominent present-day ethnographer on Cameroon, and I myself as a specialist on Southern Africa, have found him ethnographically amazingly reliable; Fardon, R., 1990, *Between God, the dead and the wild: Chamba interpretations of ritual and religion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for International African Institute.

⁷⁴ Cf. Ralushai, N.M.N., & Gray, J.R., 1977, 'Ruins and traditions of the Ngoni and the Mbedzi among the Venda of the northern Transvaal', *Rhodesian History*, 8: 1-11; Frobenius, L., 1931, *Erythräa: Länder und Zeiten des heiligen Königsmordes*, Berlin/Zürich: Atlantis-Verlag; van Binsbergen, 2003, o.c., pp. 300f; Dolisane-Ebossé Nyambé, Cécile, 2005, *Le festival de la mer à Douala, Cameroun*, seminar paper, African Studies Centre, Leiden.

Princess of Heaven, wielding her bow, and playing a major role in the conceptualisation of sacrifice of black cattle to the sky deity (black because of the coveted rain clouds) in South Central and Southern Africa. The Princess of Heaven features prominently in regions that, in terms of kingship and ecstatic cults, in terms of the present argument would seem to qualify as having undergone considerable Asian / Buddhist influence. Although the Princess of Heaven may be considered a Pelasgian concept, yet I suspect that tracing of this theme in the Asian world would yield fruitful insights for Africa.

These are enough themes to fill one individual's lifetime of future research, or better still a departmental or even an institutional research programme, but I am near the end of my career and my intention is not to embark on a new life's project, but to wind up those that have had me occupied for decades, already. Let me briefly elaborate on some of the potentially Buddhist-related African topics outlined above.

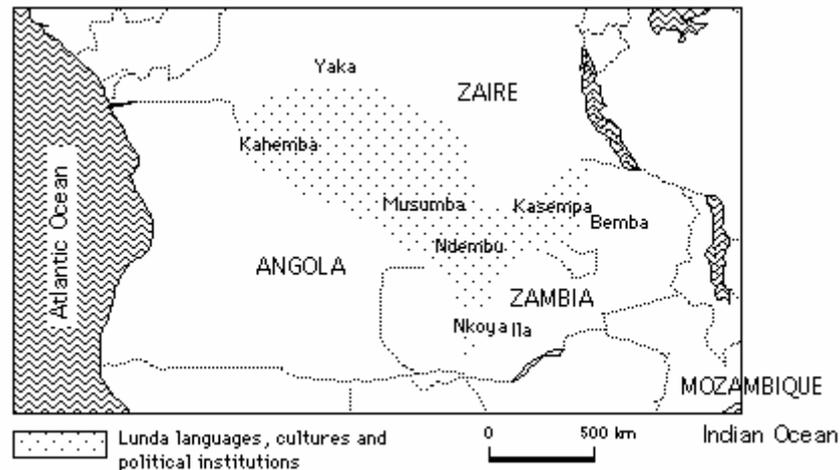


Fig. 24. The Lunda region, South Central Africa, as a likely target of transcontinental, South Asian and South East Asian cultural influences during the Common Era

In this connection, three institutional complexes appear to constitute particularly interesting cases, and therefore to deserve a brief discussion in its own right:

- African ecstatic cults (also known as cults of affliction)
- aspects of the culture of kingship, especially in West Africa
- African boat cults



Fig. 25. Bow of a ship, Douala, Cameroon, 19th c. CE, suggestive of Indonesian or Oceanian influences⁷⁵

3.5.3. Ecstatic cults as further indications of Buddhist influence on sub-Saharan Africa

While given the exposure to South Asia, across the adjacent Indian Ocean, and even to China (given the well-documented expedition to the East African coast by the Chinese Admiral 鄭和 Zheng He in the early 15th century CE),⁷⁶ the idea of Buddhist influence in East and Southern Africa may have some credibility in the eyes of Africanists, but what is likely to meet with dogged incredulity is my proposal of an extension of Asian influence to the West African Coast (Namibia, Angola, Lower Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana). Now the general agreement is that trade has been a major influence in the spread of Islam in Africa. To this Becker⁷⁷ has added the brilliant insight that Islam was perceived by the African population as offering a new and more powerful magic; while Horton has argued that Islam's attraction lay in the fact that the immense scope of the divine Being proffered by Islam was commensurate to the opening up of the local African world to transregional contacts.⁷⁸ The point now is that all along the African West Coast we see cults of affliction emerge in the course of the second millennium CE, most of

⁷⁵ This figure © http://www.galerie-herrmann.de/arts/art2/around_and_around/205Abou_Bug.htm , with thanks.

⁷⁶ Cf. Duijvendak, o.c.; also the recent propagandistic album by Song Mingwang et al. 2005. Zheng He's exploits came to be known to the general Africanist community by Basil Davidson's popular book *Old Africa Rediscovered* (1959).

⁷⁷ Becker, C.H., 1913, 'Neue Literatur zur Geschichte Afrikas', *Der Islam*, 4: 303-312.

⁷⁸ Horton, R., 1971, 'African conversion', *Africa*, 41, 2: 85-108; van Binsbergen, 1981, o.c.

which have implicitly to do with the creation and maintaining of regional and transregional trade contacts, the creation of trust between adepts hailing from distant places, the control of monopolies, the sealing of contracts etc. A case in point are the cults studied by Janzen in the Lower Congo.⁷⁹ If in general such cults of affliction, in the form they took in historical times, reached East Africa across the Indian Ocean, the extension of trading and religious contacts across Cape of Good Hope into West Africa (of which cowries, divination bowls and geomantic divination in general are testimonies, in my opinion), then it stands to reason that Buddhism (and Hinduism) formed indirectly and obliquely a likely context for such Westbound expansion: Arabs did not follow this maritime route but reached West Africa overland by the caravan routes. The Asian element in West African cults has been recognised before; it will be all the more readily be recognised in the light of the present argument, and will probably appear considerable on closer scrutiny.

Ecstatic cults abound around the Bight of Benin including parts of Cameroon. Often the veneration of maritime elements is an important aspect of them. The images (Fig. 26 a, b courtesy Chesi)⁸⁰ show characteristic episodes of *Vodun* cults in Togo. They have also been a prominent expression in coastal East Africa and in SC Africa especially in recent centuries, where (at the eve of the penetration of Islam and Christianity) they have partly supplanted pre-existing local ancestral cults (van Binsbergen 1981). In the latter regions people often consider them spiritual *winds* that come from the east, on the wings of long-distance trade. Often appearing in conjunction with divination systems, there is much reason to see them as local applications of cultic systems of Madagascar, and ultimately of Sri Lanka and other Asian regions around the Indian Ocean, where ecstatic cults (often concentrating on healing and witchcraft) form an undercurrent of Buddhism and Hinduism.⁸¹ Note the transcontinental bricolage in the bottom picture, featuring among other items the Hindu deities Ganesha and Parvati, his mother. Specialists have for decades recognised the South Asian aspects of *Vodun*.

⁷⁹ Janzen J., 1978 *The Quest for therapy: medical pluralism in Lower Zaire*. Berkeley: University of California press; also cf. Janzen, J.M., 1992, *Ngoma: Discourses of healing in Central and Southern Africa*, Los Angeles/ Berkeley/ Londen: University of California Press; cf. van Dijk, R., Reis, R., & Spierenburg, M., 2000, eds., *The quest for fruition through ngoma*, London: Currey.

⁸⁰ Chesi, G., 1980-1981, *Voodoo: Africa's secret power*, Wörgl (Austria): Perlinger; Engl. tr. of *Voodoo: Afrikas geheime Macht*, 1979, Wörgl (Austria): Perlinger; a relevant collection is also: Mueller, Klaus E., & Ritz-Mueller, Ute, photographs Christoph, Henning, 1999, *Soul of Africa: Magical rites and traditions*, Koeln: Koenemann.

⁸¹ Of the extensive literature on possession and mediumship in South and South East Asia, I only mention: Kakar, S., 1983, *Shamans, mystics and doctors: A psychological inquiry into India and its healing traditions*, Boston: Beacon Press, paperback repr. of 1982 edition, New York: Knopf; Patamajorn, R., 2007, *Spirit Mediumship in Thailand: A Performance Theory Approach*, PhD thesis, University of Heidelberg; Kapferer, B., 1997, *The Feast of the Sorcerer, Practices of Consciousness and Power*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. For the African connection, cf. Alpers, E.A., 1984, ' "Ordinary household chores": Ritual and power in a 19th-century Swahili women's spirit possession cult', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 17, 4: 677-702; Bourignon, E.M., 1968, *A cross-cultural study of dissociational states*, Columbus: Ohio State University Research Foundation; Bourignon, E.M., 1976, *Possession*, San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp.



(a) Mami Wata ritual on the shore of the Bight of Benin; (b) open-air vodun session; (c) and (d) Vodun priestesses in their shrine (e) An altar (© 2010 Museum of the African Diaspora) for the thunder and lightning god Shango in North Carolina, USA – continuous with many such cult places in West Africa; (g) by comparison, the popular temple of Wat Thummikarat, Ayutthaya, Thailand; also cf. the tree shrine of Fig. 30.

Fig. 26. Ecstatic cults in West Africa reminiscent of Asian influences

3.5.4. Identifying possibly South Asian / South East Asian elements in African kingship

We have already mentioned one striking Asian-African parallel that seems to be suggestive of East-West borrowing in the context of African kingship: the royal orchestra. But there is more.





(a) Akan festival showing gold-leafed wooden stool, royal umbrellas, and court officials seated in state, Akuropon, Ghana, photographed by Herbert Cole in 1972 (after Lavallev n.d., with thanks); the other photographs picture royal processions in modern Ghana and Nigeria

Fig. 27. The public presentation of kingship in West Africa:

Today, as a result of Afrocentrism and the Black Athena debate, popular reconstructions of early African history tend to reach back to Ancient Egypt for prototypes; also non-Afrocentrist writers of an earlier vintage have stressed continuity between Ancient Egypt and West Africa: such as Seligman, Meyerowitz, and Wainwright (already mentioned – with an Egyptocentric orientation) and Petrie (who in line with recent trends stressed rather Egypt’s indebtedness to sub-Saharan Africa).⁸² One would therefore expect that also the royal sunshades of present-day West Africa have an Ancient Egyptian origin. This however is not supported by the evidence. Portable sunshades / umbrellas are very rare in Egyptian iconography – the standard form there is the fan, whose shade-producing surface is vertical rather than horizontal. Prototypes of umbrellas are however available in Assyrian reliefs from the 1st millenium BCE. Considering Dierk Lange’s argument⁸³ for an extensive Mesopotamian and Israelite influence on West Africa, it is possible that the West African royal umbrellas hail from the Ancient Near East. *However, in view of their overwhelming prevalence in South and South East Asian royal and especially religious contexts, an equally plausible hypothesis is that they have reached West Africa as a cultural influence from Asia, via Cape of Good Hope.*

⁸² Petrie, W.M.F., 1914, ‘Egypt in Africa, I’, *Ancient Egypt*, iii: 115-27, Petrie, W.M.F., 1914, ‘Egypt in Africa, II’, *Ancient Egypt*, iv: 159-170. In this connection the Egyptologist Fairman has formulated what I have called Fairman’s dilemma: should Egyptian-African continuities be interpreted as evidence of influence of Egypt in sub-Saharan Africa, or as evidence that Egypt is a product of sub-Saharan Africa? Fairman, H. W. , 1965, ‘ Ancient Egypt and Africa ‘ , *African Affairs*, Vol. 64, Special Issue: African Studies Association of the United Kingdom, Proceedings of the 1964 Conference. (1965), pp. 69-75.

⁸³ E.g. Lange, Dierk., 2004, ‘Preservation of the Canaanite creation culture in Ife’, in: Probst, P., & Spittler, G., eds., *Between resistance and expansion: Explorations of local vitality in Africa*, Berlin etc.: LIT, pp. 125-155



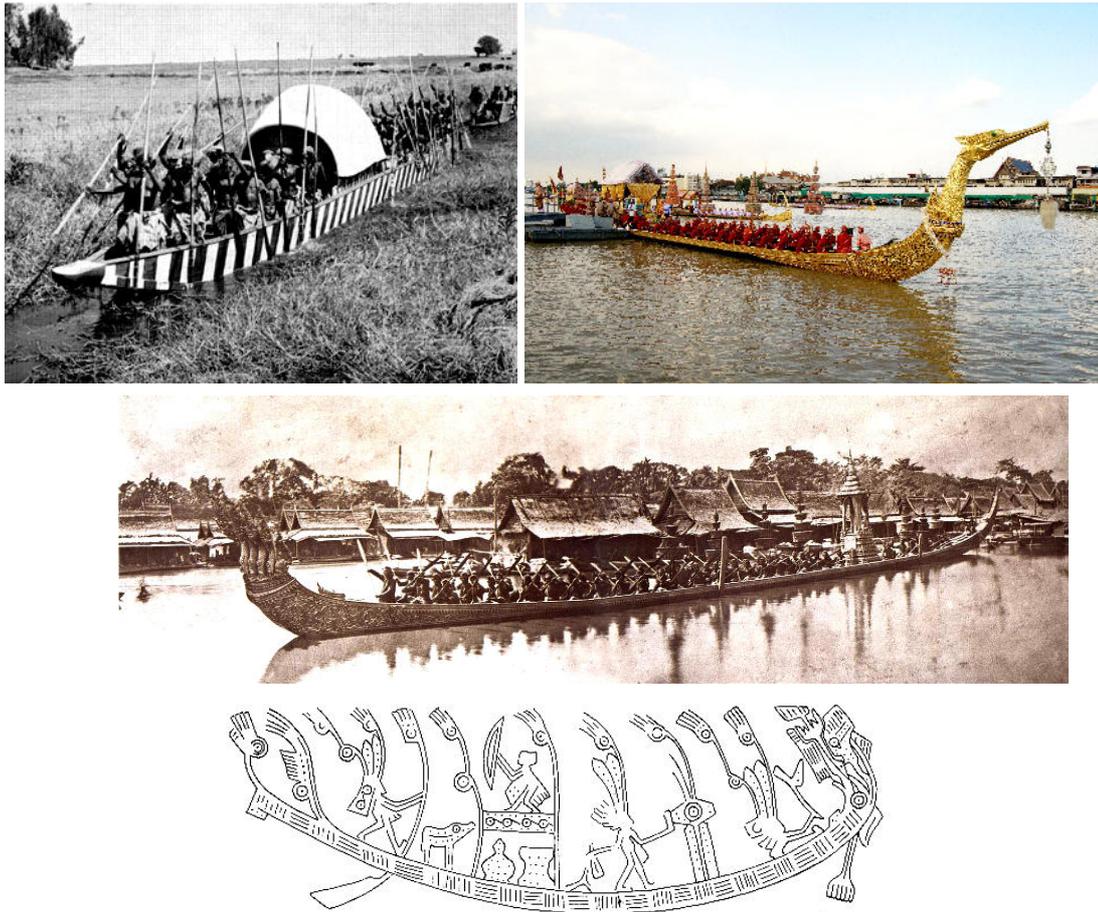
(a) An artist's impression of the use of royal fan in Ancient Egypt – based however on the best Egyptological expertise of a century ago⁸⁴; (b) Tut-^cAnkh-Amon's sunshade, revealing a totally different conception from the portable umbrella (this king's funerary treasure also comprised a semi-circular metal fan on a pole); (c) Ramesses III with fans, coloured Medinet Habu relief (detail); (d) Assyrian king Sennacherib, with prototypical sunshade mounted onto his chariot; (e) Assyrian king Shalmanesser under sunshade; (f) Ethiopian representation of royal umbrella.

Fig. 28. Sunshades transcontinentally

3.5.2. Identifying possibly South Asian / South East Asian elements in African boat cults

On this point I must limit myself to just the presentation of pictorial material:

⁸⁴ Maspero, G., & Sayce, A. H., L. W. King, H. R. Hall, M. L. McClure, 1903, History of Egypt, Chaldea, Syria, Babylonia, and Assyria, I-VIII, London: Grolier Society



(a) The Nalikwanda, royal barge of the Barotse / Lozi king, during the annual migration ceremony called the Kuomboka; (b) Thai royal barge end of 129th c.; (c) Thai royal barge today. Maritime processions and pageant are known from all over continental South East Asia; (d) boat image on a Dong Son drum⁸⁵

Fig. 29. The royal boat cult in South Central Africa and in South East Asia

3.6. What periodisation can we propose for Asian-African cultural continuity?

If there thus seems to be a possible case for Asian-African borrowing regardless of the advent of Islam to Africa, it becomes important to suggest rough dates for the proposed Buddhist and Hinduist influence.

Indian Ocean trade linking the Persian Gulf and the Indus Valley dates from the second millennium BCE. In the same period, Egypt had extensive trade with Somalia and the Arabian Peninsula, possibly also extending further South along the East African coast. Around the beginning of the Common Era, trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean was thriving, and Roman ladies were dressed in diaphanous silk from what

⁸⁵ Cf. Christie, A., 1961, 'De tradities van Zuidoost-Azië', in: Piggott, S., ed., 1961, *De wereld ontwaakt*, Den Haag: Gaade, p. 277-300; also Li, W. 1986. *Tonggu chuanwen de zai tan su* (discussion of the boat motif on bronze drums). In *Zhongguo Tonggu Yanjiuhui* editors, *Zhongguo tonggu yanjiu Hui dierci xueshu taolun hui lunwenji* (Collected articles from the second conference on Chinese bronze drums), pages 234-48. Wen Wu Publishing House, Beijing.

the Romans called Seria, i.e. China. If in these millennia there was specific Asian-African cultural borrowing, I would not know how to identify it, although the global maritime network I proposed above was already well established for millennia at the time. During the T'ang dynasty, Chinese trade on the Persian Gulf was thriving and brought, besides merchandise, many items of Chinese intellectual culture there (e.g. medical practices such as taking the pulse, and divinatory practices) which had a great influence on Islamic Mesopotamian culture, and from there spread both to Europe and to Africa through vehicles that hitherto have been exclusively perceived as Islamic. Great Zimbabwe was build from the 11th c. CE onward, and if it can be argued to display Buddhist influences, those should at least go back to the end of the first millennia CE. In the same time as the rise of Great Zimbabwe, Chinese merchants were sufficiently acquainted with Southern Africa to sketch an adequate map of its coastline. The prototype of a 36-zodiac such as seems to be reflected in Venda and West African divination bowls, dates from the first millennium CE, and I propose to provisionally put the time of its borrowing into African divination repertoires around 1000 CE, first in Southern Africa, subsequently in West Africa. I am under the impression (which however needs to be confirmed in detail) that accounts of cults of affliction and possession cults in West Africa can be found in European travelogues from Early Modern times, which suggests that in the first half of the second millennium Asian influence spilled via Cape of Good Hope to the West African coast as far as the Bight of Benin, possibly further West even. This Asian influence hailed from a Hinduist / Buddhist provenance, and not from an Islamic one: Islam only reached West Africa through caravan routes overland, and not overseas. A period of 500 to 1,000 years seems long enough for the South, South East and East Asian influence on sub-Saharan Africa (East, Southern and West) to be incorporated into local and regional cultures in a process of effective transformative localisation (so effective, in fact, as to wipe out all conspicuous traces of a transcontinental origin),⁸⁶ yet short enough to allow these borrowed cultural items to retain a measure of recognisability. A condition that adds further credibility to the idea that some package of cultural elements was transmitted overseas from continental South East Asia (including Thailand) to sub-Saharan Africa is the fact that in the middle of the second millennium CE, when such transmission is most likely to have occurred, there were intensive political, religious and economic relations between the kingdom of Siam (now Thailand) and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) – whereas the latter island, situated south of the Indian subcontinent, has always been recognised as an obvious stepping stone in the transmission of Sunda elements (genes, people, artefacts and ideas) from insular South East Asia (especially Indonesia) to Africa.

3.7. Limitations of the idea of transcontinental borrowing in proto-historical and historical time: The tree cult in Thai Buddhism shows that there is also a common substratum between Africa and South East Asia; exploring the Pelasgian heritage since the Neolithic

Meanwhile, the cult of trees throughout South and South East Asia reminds us of the fact that there are also Old World communalities (probably going back to the Neolithic or even Upper Palaeolithic, in which both Africa and South East Asia share without being the result of diffusion of one continent to the other in recent millennia. Sacred trees and tree myths feature all over the Old World, and make it plausible that the mytheme of

⁸⁶ We are reminded of the apt title of Robert Dick-Read's 2005 book: these Asian seafarers seem to be *Phanton Voyagers*.

cosmogony and anthropogony from a tree belongs to humankind's oldest mythical repertoire, probably dating back to before the Out-of-Africa Exodus c. 60 ka BP.⁸⁷ Throughout the Old World we can find offerings to sacred trees in the form of textile: shreds torn from the believer's own clothes (as in North Africa as well as West and Central Asia), considerable metrages of new cloth deposited at the foot of the tree as in pre-colonial South Central Africa (where white cloth was always a long-distance trade item rather than a product of local home industry), or striped of cloth wound around the trunk as in South East Asia.



⁸⁷ Witzel, M., 2001b, 'Comparison and reconstruction: Language and mythology', *Mother Tongue*, 6: 45-62; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2006, 'Mythological archaeology: Situating sub-Saharan African cosmogonic myths within a long-range intercontinental comparative perspective', in: Osada, Toshiki, with the assistance of Hase, Noriko, eds., *Proceedings of the Pre-symposium of RIHN and 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Roundtable*, Kyoto: Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN), pp. 319-349; also at: http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/kyoto%20as%20published%202006%20EDIT2.pdf ; Witzel, M., in press, *Homo fabulans: Origins and dispersals of our first mythologies* New York: Oxford University Press.



(a) Log wrapped in cloth venerated at a riverside temple in Bangkok; (b) an alleged clone of the original bodhi tree at Wat Pho temple, Bangkok; (c) close-up of cloth would around the tree at (b); (d) inscribed forked planks and branches placed against the tree at (b) – note that the forked branch (while a time-honoured type of village shrine throughout Niger-Congo speaking Africa) was the main cultic emblem of the ecological cult of the Ila prophet Mupumani (active in Central Zambia 1914-15) and of various ecstatic cults that, coming from the Indian Ocean region, swept South Central Africa since the 19th century CE;⁸⁸ (e) forked branches lying at the foot of the tree at (b); (f, g) at Ayutthaya, a tree that has clutched a statue's severed Buddha head in its roots, is on the other side covered under statuettes and other objects of veneration; (g) by comparison: the central village *waringin* tree of the village of Nyu Kuning, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, with a broad chequered cloth around its trunk; (h) at the Wat Si Chum temple, Sukhothai, a sacred tree lavishly adorned with cloth overlooks an outside Buddha statue (centre left) as well as the tall chapel (centre) in which the famous, giant standing Buddha is kept. Throughout the Old World (I first encountered this arrangement during fieldwork in the highlands of North-western Tunisia, 1968) sacred trees occur in the near vicinity of man-made shrines, as if the former lend their sacredness to the latter. The pictorial material presented here could be augmented *at libidum* with examples from Hinduist and Buddhist contexts in South Asia.

Fig. 30. Aspects of the tree cult in South East Asia

⁸⁸ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J, 1981, *Religious Change in Zambia: Exploratory studies*, London/Boston: Kegan Paul International.



Fig. 31. A nature genius surrounded (in accordance with a sacrificial culture encompassing much of South, South East and East Asia) by fresh vegetal offerings, in a garden setting, Wat Pho temple, Bangkok

Along with trees, other forces of undomesticated nature are being venerated in Hinduism / Buddhism, for instance those represented in gardens as malicious looking spirits / *genii* (cf. the *jinn* /pl. *jenun* of the Islamic world).

However, this example of the tree cult very far from exhausts such communalities between South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa as can be attributed to a common cultural substratum going back to the Neolithic. Elsewhere⁸⁹ I have developed the Pelasgian Hypothesis, according to which a complex package of cultural items (provisionally, and somewhat confusingly, named 'Pelasgian', and comprising more than 80 different traits) arose in West Central Asia in the Neolithic, in the process of its subsequent transformation (yielding 'Secondary Pelasgian') also spread to the Mediterranean, finally to be spread in all four directions (the Eurasian Steppe belt all the way to the Pacific, South and South East Asia, and ultimately even Oceania; sub-Saharan Africa; Northern Europe; Western and Southern Europe) towards the end of the Bronze Age, largely as a result of greatly

⁸⁹ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2011, 'The limits of the Black Athena thesis and of afrocentricity as empirical explanatory models: The *Borean hypothesis, the Back-into-Africa hypothesis and the Pelasgian hypothesis as suggestive of a common, West Asian origin for the continuities between Ancient Egypt and the Aegean, with a new identity for the goddess Athena', in: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., ed., *Black Athena comes of age*, Berlin / Boston / Munster: LIT, pp. 291-321; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2010c, *Towards the Pelasgian hypothesis: An integrative perspective long-range ethnic, cultural, linguistic and genetic affinities encompassing Africa, Europe, and Asia*, Leiden: *Papers in Intercultural Philosophy and Transcontinental Comparative Studies*; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., & Woudhuizen, Fred C., 2011, *Ethnicity in Mediterranean proto-history*, Cambridge: *British Archaeology Reports (BAR) International Series*.

increased technologies of communication – foremost the spoke-wheel chariot (invented in Kazakhstan c. 2,000 BCE).

The following Table presents a few remarks on those ‘Pelasgian’ items (numbered as in my original presentation of the Pelasgian Hypothesis) that occur both in South East Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa. The point of course is that, if these Pelasgian traits have spread to both sub-Saharan Africa and to South East Asia from the Bronze Age onward, we scarcely need specific East-West transmission along the proposed intercontinental maritime network to explain their presence in sub-Saharan Africa in historical times.

item no.	description	proposed interpretation in terms of to East-West transmission in historical times
4	cult of the sea	This cult has probably an Upper Palaeolithic background, and manifests itself in a great variety of cults of major and minor deities associated not only with the sea but also with rivers, lakes, streams etc. While there is thus a shared substrate between Asia and Africa, I am inclined to believe (for reason of formal similarities in cultic paraphernalia, dress, organisation etc.) that the specific forms of Mami Wati ecstatic cults in West and Central Africa, owe a considerable debt – probably on the basis of a pre-existing African substrate – to the cults of the goddess of the waters, the princes of the sea etc. in both continental and insular South East Asia
6	boat cult; boats dominate iconography (ultimately combining with Flood myths, cult of the sea, and sun cult)	A boat cult is already a recognisable Pelasgian trait in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt; therefore for this trait we may assume pre-existing African forms due to the common Pelasgian substrate, yet recognisably transformed by ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism
14	matrifocality / premarital female sexual license / women conspicuous in political, military and religious roles, even leadership / tendency towards gender equality; female kings and male royal escorts	The Amazon type of female prowess is part of the Pelasgian heritage and may surface all over the Pelasgian distribution area, which covers much of the Old World. I think that African cases of female royal prowess need not derived from the few isolated Thai cases. Meanwhile, a Sunda element is suggested by the fact that, in South Central Africa, male royal escorts usurping female royal power have played a role in precolonial state systems comparable to that recorded for Madagascar in the 19 th century.
26	the cult of the earth: landscape (or rather river scape) parcelled into shrine regions each served by a – typically aniconic, <i>e.g.</i> herm-like – cult often also dispensing divination; palladium	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate; I have provisionally explored aspects of its Old World continuity in connection with the Nagara Padang devotional site among the Sunda people of Western Java ⁹⁰
27	complementary to the cult of the earth: socio-political units with (aniconic?) palladium, sacred to <i>e.g.</i> virgin warrior goddess (\approx creatrix)	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate; however, it is possible that royal drums as palladium in Africa owe something to Asian examples – as the rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of

⁹⁰ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2010, The UNPAR Department of Philosophy’s Departmental study days at the devotional shrine of Nagara Padang, village of Rawabogo, Ciwidey, West Bandung [Indonesia], at: <http://shikanda.net/topicalities/Nagara%20Padang%20for%20UNPAR%20illustrated.pdf>, with extensive regional, comparative and theoretical literature.

		ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism
33	elaborate death industry around royals, for royals themselves funerals are taboo	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate
38	tree cult, cult of the initiatory sacred forest	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate
39	royal band with distinctive instruments: xylophones, drums, iron bell / gong	unmistakable Sunda influence
40	nautical skills	there is evidence of a continuity in boat types, transmitted from East to West: the outrigger, often considered an Oceanian invention (cf. Dick-Read 2005); ⁹¹ and a large eye as a boat ornament; ⁹²
41	exalted royal courts (<i>cf.</i> royal band)	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate, probably rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism
54	chariot	In the South and South East Asian tradition, the chariot is the privileged vehicle of gods and kings. Chariots reached sub-Saharan Africa in the Late Bronze Age, the rain forest and tsetse fly largely precluded the expansion of horse and chariot south of the equator. I am unaware of the symbolic significance, if any, of the chariot in royal contexts in West Africa. In South Central Africa, among the Nkoya, a major mythical king Kapesh, whose name has no local etymology, seems to be named after the Sanskrit word for 'chariot beam'. It is this kind of detail that seems to confirm a considerable South and/or South East Asian influence on African kingship
56	shamanism and cults of affliction	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate, probably rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism
58	raiding and trading	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate, probably rearrangement (in terms of a royal monopoly on certain goods, and on long-distance trade) of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism
59	slavery	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate, probably rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism
60	great magical powers attributed to royals	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate, probably rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism /

⁹¹ But *cf.*: Hornell, J., 1928, '102. South American Balanced Canoes: Stages in the Invention of the Double Outrigger', *Man* 28 (8):129-33.

⁹² Hornell, James, 1923, 'Survivals of the Use of Oculi in Modern Boats', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 53, (Jul. - Dec., 1923), pp. 289-321; Hornell, J., 1938, 'Boat Oculi Survivals: Additional Records', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 68,: 339-348. Also see the arch-diffusionist study: Smith, G. Elliot, 1916, 'Ships as evidence of the migrations of early cultures', *Journal of the Manchester Egyptian and Oriental Society*, pp. 63- 102.

		Buddhism
61	cults of affliction considered to be of alien origin	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate, probably rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism
68	reincarnation belief	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate, probably rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism

Table 1. Proposed interpretation in terms of to East-West transmission in historical times, of the occurrence of certain Pelasgian traits both in South and South East Asia, and in sub-Saharan Africa.

In the light of the discussion in Table 1, a considerable South and South East Asian cultural impact on sub-Saharan Africa, under the signature of the world religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, appears to be a distinct possibility, even though as yet the empirical evidence is somewhat scarce. Usually, the necessary empirical data begin to become manifest under the heuristic effect of such a hypothesis, once formulated.

4. Conclusion

On the basis of a consideration of selected aspects of South and South East culture and history, against the background of the results of my earlier results into transcontinental continuities between Asia and Africa in the field of divination and ecstatic cults, I hope to have demonstrated that the study of such continuities now (with the new attention for neo-diffusionist studies in the context of globalisation research) begins to open up as a promising field of enquiry. New insights in transcontinental continuities are to be expected, that may throw new light on the extent to which Africa has always been part of global cultural history, and should not be imprisoned in a paradigm that (out of a sympathetic but mistaken loyalty to African identity and originality) seeks to explain things African exclusively by reference to Africa. Is Africa to lose or to gain from these new transcontinental insights? It will be further dismantled as a nostalgic geopolitical construct subject to ‘othering’, but gain vitality and credibility as part and parcel of the world as a whole.