

## Why People are Mortal?

### Indo-Pacific Mythology and the "Out-of-Africa" Scenario

#### Abstract

Statistical processing of more than 1200 folklore and mythological motifs selected from about 35,000 texts suggests the existence of major dichotomy between Indo-Pacific and Continental Eurasian sets of motifs (the status of Western European data is still unclear). A series of motifs which explain the origin of death is widespread across Indo-Pacific part of the Globe, unknown in continental Eurasia but finds parallels in Africa to the south of Sahara.

#### The approach

The areal distribution of folklore and mythological motifs is a still unexplored source of data on early migrations and cultural contacts. The use of this source is possible as far as we understand culture as a set of elements subject to multiple replication.

The interpretation of culture as the system of acquired, borrowed patterns was elaborated after the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by scholars whose prime aim was to study not the origin of these patterns but their meaning. "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols", had been deduced by Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn [1952: 181]. Though "symbols" seems to be a key word of this definition, it is equally important that patterns of behavior are acquired, not invented. According to Clifford Geertz [1973: 92-94], patterns of culture function in a way fairly similar to the one in which DNA forms coded programs for the synthesis of proteins. Cultural patterns are "extrinsic sources of information" that provide blueprints, templates, or, more to the point, models for relations "among entities, processes or what-have-you in physical, organic, social, or psychological systems", but every time such a pattern is reproduced from some earlier sample. The predominant trend in the 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropology was to study cultural elements as "models for reality", as sets of symbols which are understood, recognized and interpreted in particular way peculiar to the bearers of a given culture. However, the study of elements of culture as "models of reality" which are copied unconsciously and selected only by the researcher, is also possible.

Addressing traditional narratives, we can treat them either as entities which are meaningful for bearers of a particular culture and considered by them as expressing their unique cultural values, or as combinations of plots and images which are borrowed from both earlier generations and from the neighboring groups and which have mostly cross-cultural distribution. To a certain degree, the same can be said about any sphere of culture but the place of narratives is special thanks to their weak dependence on the environmental and social factors. Very often, the content of myths and tales has almost nothing to do with the reality of the world in which people live but these inconsistencies do not directly influence people's life. The narratives are reproduced not because they correspond to any reality but either because they are considered sacred and are intentionally taught and learnt or (and) because they are "interesting", i.e. their learning does not need much effort while their further retelling provides psychological and social advantages.

The units of our research are not, however, narratives themselves but the motifs, i.e. the elements incorporated into the narratives which very existence is not recognized by the bearers of the tradition. The standard system for classification of motifs is that of Stith Thompson [1955]. For

Thompson, “the main purpose of classification of traditional narratives, whether by type or motif”, was “to furnish an exact style of reference, whether it be for analytical study or for the making of accurate inventories of large bodies of material” [Thompson 1951: 427]. Accordingly, the motif was defined as “the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition” [Thompson 1951: 415]. This restriction (“the smallest”) was necessary to make of the motifs the appropriate units for the formalized description of texts. The objectives of present project are connected, however, not with the description of particular texts but with selection of common elements in different traditions. Thompson's index contains more than 30,000 motifs. This number can be increased but as far as the series of themes addressed by traditional folklore is exhaustible, it is not infinite. The number of motifs relevant to our present purposes is practically much smaller (few thousands at best) but potentially it is infinite because we consider as motifs not only the elementary units but also any combinations and chains of such units shared by two or more traditions. The definitions of motifs are instrumental, the list of motifs is subject to change and increases as long as the researcher processes more texts and finds links unnoticed before. With only one text in hand, we are unable to select any motif<sup>1</sup>.

What motifs should we select depends on the geographical scale and purpose of the research. Our database has been created with an aim to study distant intercontinental folklore links which potentially preserve information on the early contacts between continental Eurasia, its Indo-Pacific borderlands, Oceania, Australia and the Americas. Would we concentrate on the research inside e.g. only North America or Australia, the set of selected motifs were different.

As it has been told above, the narratives are reproduced both because they are considered sacred (received from the ancestors, gods, etc.) and because they are “interesting”. The bearers of folklore traditions usually select from all others some particular categories of texts in which their world view is expressed in the most direct way. We can call such narratives the myths. The motifs, though selected from the narratives, are taken out of their contexts and deprived of cultural specifics. Accordingly, it is impossible to apply to them such notions as the sacred and the profane (any motif can potentially be used in any context). Still, as far as the motifs are connected with realities, they have unequal probability of being used in myths or in non-sacred tales. The cosmological and etiological motifs are more often employed in narratives which are highly meaningful for people. In these narratives any deviations from accepted standards are regularly suppressed. The stories of adventure and deceit, whose protagonists are not necessarily the objects of cult, are normally subject to a less severe censorship, and the motifs used in such narratives can be more easily deformed. In this case, natural selection of the fittest variants probably plays a significant role. The motifs included in the non-sacred tales often correspond to different kinds of actions and conflict situations.

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<sup>1</sup> Though some of our motifs coincide with the Thompson's ones (e.g. *Thunder-bird*, A284.2, *Land fished from the ocean*, A811.I, *Cosmic hunt*, F59.2), this correspondence is not systematic and is rarely complete. The American anthropologists of late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> century also used non-Thompson approach to definition of motifs concentrating their attention only on those elements of the texts which were widespread across North American continent [Boas 2002 (1895): 635-674; Kroeber 1908; Swanton 1929: 269-274; a.o.]. The analytical units we speak about are sometimes similar to the tale-types [Aarne and Thompson 1964]. However, unlike the latter, the motifs do not have variants. For purposes of comparative analysis, motifs, be they elementary or complex, must be strictly defined. Elements of the texts, which do not correspond precisely to definition elaborated by the researcher, are not included into our database. Distantly similar cases should be either ignored or a new motif with such a wording to which all corresponding cases answer should be defined. A practice of searching for the nearest similar motif of Thompson's Index and supplying it with a plus (+) if no direct analogy is available (e.g. [Wilbert and Simoneau 1992:50-51]) is unacceptable for our purposes. If we claim that a given text contains a particular motif, we mean that it contains all combinations of episodes or sets of images mentioned in the wording of this motif. Otherwise the inclusion of a particular case in a given series would depend on the subjective opinion of a researcher as about how near or distant a particular narrative is to the sample one.

At the moment (December 2005), the distribution of 1,214 motifs across 230 areas of Old and New World has been studied.

Selecting the areas, we kept in mind that they should be culturally (though not necessary linguistically) uniform and the corresponding data on mythology and folklore should be rich enough. The statistical processing of poorly known traditions easily provides aberrant results. For example, for Greater Antilles and Eastern Hindu Kush – Kashmir areas my samples of motifs which describe actions and tricks are insufficient and the position of corresponding areas on figs. 2-4 is can seriously deviate from reality. The data on the Balkans and Central Europe (Bulgaria, Romania, Germany, Poland) are still also incomplete. In most other cases, the processing of additional publications do not change significantly a set of motifs established for a given area, and we can conclude that the data are representative enough. The motifs were selected from about 35,000 texts published mainly in English, German, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, also in Dutch, Estonian and Italian, several cases in Finnish, Polish, Bulgarian and other languages.<sup>2</sup> Africa, the Arabian East, most of the Western Europe and most of Polynesia are still beyond the scope of the research. The Ancient Greek mythology and the Edda<sup>3</sup> are included, Ancient Near Eastern mythologies are not.

To reveal the tendencies in the mutual correlation of the motifs, factor analysis (the analysis of the principal components) was applied [Berezkin 2005a]. The first principal component demonstrates the most important tendency. Because different factors can be responsible for the replication of the cosmological and etiologial motifs (group A) and of the episodes of adventure and deceit (group B), the corpus of our data has been divided into two parts. The separate processing of the motifs of the two groups has produced additional information on the direction and to a certain extent nature of the remote links between sets of motifs peculiar for particular regions.

Five hundred and seventy four motifs of group A (*A-motifs*) describe the origin, configuration, and characteristic features of nature, society and man. It should be emphasized that motifs whose distributions were clearly defined by natural or social factors and cannot have global distributions were excluded from the statistical processing from the very beginning, e.g. Thompson's motif A1115 (*Urine makes sea water salty*) cannot be found in continental areas while *Cultivated plants emerge from the body of a person* cannot be found in the Arctic<sup>4</sup>. The mythologies of the Americas and of South-East Asia and Oceania are particularly rich in stories which describe the origin of cultivated plants. Some of these stories are similar on both sides of the Pacific [Hatt 1951]. Because the East Asian and American productive economies developed in isolation from each other, the corresponding sets of motifs must also have emerged independently. Their similarities could be explained by the influence of specific features of agriculture which are shared by the people of the

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<sup>2</sup> The electronic Analytical Catalogue of Mythological Motifs consists of abstracts of texts classified according to ethnic groups, regions and motifs. The abstract of each text is copied into the Catalogue as many times as necessary, once for each motif which the text contains. The table of occurrences is constructed with rows for motifs and columns for areas. The creation of the Catalogue and the research on its base have been supported by the Program of Basic Research of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) \*Ethnocultural interaction in Eurasia+ and by the Russian Fund of Basic Research (grant 04-06-80238).

<sup>3</sup> On the maps the area for Greece corresponds to the Ancient Greek mythology and not to contemporary Greek folklore. The Scandinavian cluster includes only the data extracted from Edda. For Iran, India, China and Japan all the data from early sources are merged with the recent collections of texts.

<sup>4</sup> However, if the ecologically specific motif is distributed inside an area which is smaller than the territory where it could be potentially known, this motif was computed, e.g. *Big water reptile as giver of cultivated plants* (this motif is typical for the South American lowlands) is recorded inside the area which is smaller than the zone inhabited by crocodiles, caymans and anacondas and also smaller than the area of neotropical horticulture. Accordingly, the presence of the corresponding motif in the mythologies of some South and Central American peoples and its absence in the mythologies of their neighbors has to be due mainly to historic and not to ecological reasons.

circum-Pacific region (unlike Western Eurasian agriculture, the tropical American and South-East Asian-Oceanic systems were heavily based on root crops and on the vegetative propagation of plants). At the same time, we can hypothesize that mythologies which were initially parts of one and the same cultural system could continue to produce independently similar motifs after the time of their separation. Whether it was so or not, all agricultural motifs which are the same in America, on one hand, and in Asia and Oceania, on the other, were not taken into consideration<sup>5</sup>. This means that all distant intercontinental links revealed by our research are based on the distribution of only those motifs which could potentially have been known to the Late Paleolithic hunter-gatherers and brought to America across Northeast Asia and Alaska.

Group B includes 659 motifs typical of the stories of adventure and of trickster tales. No external factors appear which could systematically promote or restrict their spread.

## Results of statistical processing of data

For A-motifs, Northern Eurasia and Eastern South America proved to be the most distant from each other, i.e. the sets of motifs typical for these two regions have a minimal number of common elements (fig. 1).

Statistical indexes for North America and Southern Eurasia are lower than the Siberian-Mongolian maximum, but still they are relatively high (the index for the Ojibwa is almost the same as for the Nganasan and slightly higher than for the Aryan India). Continental Siberia and North America are separated by the North Pacific (Ainu, Kamchadal, Koryak, Asiatic Eskimo, Central Yupic, Alutiiq, Aleut, Tanaina, Tanana, Athna) and Arctic (different groups of Inupiaq-Inuit) mythologies which are somewhat shifted towards the Amazonian pole. For the Eastern Inuit, Alutiiq and Aleut this shift is considerable, the Aleut index being approximately the same as for the Northern Central Andes.

As about the opposite pole, New Guinea has the statistical index which fits the highest standards of typically Amazonian mythologies (indexes below -2.50). For all these traditions the institutionalized opposition of men and women inside the community, the male rituals and the sacred musical instruments prohibited for the women are typical [Tuzin and Gregor 2001]. Because many motifs shared by the Papuans, Melanesians and the Amazonian Indians are incorporated into this ritual-mythological complex, it could be hypothesized that the corresponding motifs could not provide the independent evidence in favor of any historic links between regions (as far as we have the same male rituals themselves, we have also all the attendant features which could possibly emerge independently). To check this hypothesis, we excluded from the processing all those motifs which are connected with gender, sex, origin of genitalia, male-female antagonism, etc. Nevertheless, the index for the New Guinea mythology remained well inside the South American range (-2.3 for Paresi, -1.7 for Munduruku, -1.6 for New Guinea, -1.3 for Fuegians, -1.1 for Nivakle).

The statistical processing of the areal distribution of motifs of the group B (episodes of adventure and tricks) also evidences in favor of the historic and not functional explanation of the similarities between the Papuan-Melanesian and the South American Indian mythologies and folklore. Unlike two-fold division of A-motifs (Eurasia and North America vs. Australia – Melanesia and South America), the B-motifs form three rather independent regional super-clusters localized in Eurasia, North America and South America. The opposition between Eurasia and North America is demonstrated at fig. 2 by the 1<sup>st</sup> principal component (South America and Australia are more or less neutral) and the opposition between Eurasia and South America is demonstrated at fig.

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<sup>5</sup> Practically, the way of treatment of these motifs is not of much importance. Spectacular as they are, the agricultural motifs common to both American and Asian-Oceanic mythologies are few and almost do not influence statistical picture.

3 by the 2<sup>nd</sup> principal component (Australia is neutral). In this latter case there are important links between continental Eurasia and Plains – Midwest which exist thanks to the set of "heroic" motifs common to continental Eurasia and to some North American Indians but mostly absent in the Asian North-East and North American North-West [Berezkin 2003; 2004; 2005a; 2005b]. The existence of three regional (Eurasian, North American, South American) clusters of the B-motifs means that these motifs have been mainly (though not exclusively) disseminated inside the particular continents, not from one continent to another. If so, they seem to preserve statistically somewhat less remote (both in space and in time) historic links than the A-motifs. However, the New Guinean set of B-motifs has again proved to be by far the most "American" among all the non-American groups and found its place (with the index +1.5) between Paresi (+1.7) and Jivaro (+1.6). Groups which are the next closest to the American norm are the Chukchi (+0.2), the Koryak (+0.2) and the Asiatic Eskimo (+0.1). In comparison with New Guinea they are far less similar to the New World norm despite of being the nearest to America geographically. To be on the safe side, we tried again to exclude from the processing all the motifs related to the sex, gender and opposition between men and women. The results were much the same with the only modification that the very difference between North and South America became less pronounced (fig. 4).

Among the Indo-Pacific clusters Australia and Western Melanesia (Bismarck Archipelago and Solomon Islands) rather closely follow New Guinea though both are always behind it, i.e. less similar to South America. The Southeastern Melanesia (New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Loyalty Islands) share with Amazonia less number of motifs than Northwestern Melanesia while Fijian folklore is mostly Western Polynesian, not Melanesian. We can speculate that the farther to the east, the more pre-Austronesian folklore traditions were diluted with the Austronesian ones though this explanation does not work in case of Australia.

Important tendencies in distribution of motifs are discovered when we analyse the materials on non-Aryan India and on South-East Asia. The processing of the A-motifs (1<sup>st</sup> principal component) demonstrates that these regions stand nearer to Australia and New Guinea than to Eurasia, while the processing of the B-motifs (1<sup>st</sup> principal component) reveals the opposite picture (they stand nearer to Eurasia). However, according to the 2<sup>nd</sup> principal component, the sets of B-motifs in these regions are again more "Australian" than "Eurasian". It seems that in case of B-motifs the 2<sup>nd</sup> principal component deals with the earlier set of motifs than the 1<sup>st</sup> principal component. As it was told above, the B-motifs which distribution is demonstrated by the 2<sup>nd</sup> principal component are shared by continental Eurasian and by North American populations to the East of the Rockies. Though these motifs were probably brought to America in the post-Clovis time, it was still during the epoch of the initial peopling of the New World [Berezkin 2003; 2004; 2005a; 2005b]. Just these motifs which absolute age can be 10,000 or more, are not present in the non-Aryan India and South-East Asia. The 1<sup>st</sup> principal component reveals tendencies in distribution of those motifs which are specifically Eurasian and are mainly found in the fairy-tales. The fairy-tale as folklore genre is relatively recent and the sets of its plots registered in Indo-China or Indonesia are not much different from those known in Europe. It means that the early, "original" sets of motifs peculiar to the Indo-Pacific borderlands of Eurasia were more similar to Australian-Melanesian ones than to the continental Eurasian ones. Later (probably with the Induism and then with Islam) the continental Eurasian folklore occupied this ground.

### **The areal distribution of the motifs which explain the origin of death**

It was told above that the continental Eurasian motifs brought to North America (possibly in the Terminal Pleistocene or Early Holocene time) were "heroic", i.e. they are often used in tales which describe the adventures of the male heroes. The sets of motifs typically found in the Indo-Pacific part of the Globe (America, Australia, Oceania and the eastern and south-eastern borderlands of Asia) are different. Here the motifs which describe gender conflicts, strange marriages, origin of

human anatomy but also the origin of death are typical. The pattern of areal distribution of the latter group is especially remarkable.

This or that explanation of why humans are mortal could be found in almost any tradition. There is, however, a set of six easily recognizable motifs with extremely wide transcontinental though not universal territorial distribution.

1. *Shed skin*. Those who shed their skin are immortal.
2. *Immortal Moon*. Moon revives or becomes young again every month but people do not; Moon makes decision if people should die forever or regularly revive.
3. *Strong and weak*. People are mortal because they have been likened to something subject to decay and easy destruction (e.g. to the soft wood and not to the stone).
4. *Stone sinks, stick floats*. Humans are mortal because stone thrown into the water sank. They have missed a chance to be like wood or other organic matter that floated.
5. *The wrong call*. Humans are mortal because they answered a call of a being who had brought death (or they pronounced his name) or did not heard or answer a call of a being who had promised immortality (or did not pronounce his name).
6. *Vengeful cockroach*. Small animal asks God to make people mortal because they would be too numerous and step on it or deprive it of its food.

Two more motifs do not necessary treat the theme of human mortality (though usually they do).

7. *The muddled message*. Person is sent by god to bring instructions or certain objects but for some reason distorts, forgets or replaces them. This has fatal consequences for humanity or for a certain class of beings.
8. *Destiny of man discussed*. Person has a series of suggestions how to make the world easy for living and free of hard work and death. His companion or messenger successively rejects them.

Below I name tribal groups (or localities) and regions where the corresponding motifs have been recorded. Sources, being too numerous, are not provided. Khasi and Tibeto-Burman groups of the Northeast India form a separate region named "Assam". "Coast – Plateau" region is defined as in Bierhorst 1985.

**SHED SKIN** (fig. 5).

**Australia** (Karadjari; some unidentified groups), **New Guinea – Melanesia** (Highland Arapesh, Lakalai, Marind Anim, Dugum Dani, Kiwai, Kukukuku, Kewa, Trobrian Islands, Baining, Batom Islands, Admiralty Islands, Saa, San Cristobal, Florida, Banks Islands, Ambrim, Pentecost, Oba, Malekula, Torres Strait Islands, Eddystone Island, Kanaka), **Assam** (Moklum, Wancho, unidentified group), **South-East Asia** (Thai, Black Tai, Viet), **India** (Dhanwar), **Malaysia - Indonesia** (Nias, Mentawai, Dusun, Toradja, To Mori, Loinang, Bangai Islands, Timor Island), **Philippines** (Atayal, Mangian), **China** (Meo), **Japan** (Miyako Islands, Ainu), **Eskimo** (Baffin Land Inuit), **Coast - Plateau** (Klamath), **Northern Andes** (Embera, Kogi, Yupa), **Llanos** (Sicuaní), **Southern Venezuela** (Sanema, Yanomami, Yanomam), **Guiana** (Warao, Dominica Caribs, Tamanak, Locono, Kariña, Kaliña, Aparai, Arikema), **Western and NW Amazonia** (Secoya, Shuar, Karijona, Ufaina, Letuama, Barasana, Tucano proper, Tucuna, Yagua), **Central Amazonia** (Maue, unidentified group, Teffé Lake), **Eastern Amazonia** (Shipaya, Juruna, Tenetehara, Urubu), **Central Andes** (Wanka), **Montaña** (Ashaninka, Amahuaca, Cashinahua, Harakmbet), **Southern Amazonia** (Kayabi, Nambikwara, Iránxe, Trumai, Kamaiura, Bakairi), **Eastern Brazil** (Caraja, Cayapo), **Chaco** (Ayoreo, Mataco, Nivakle).

**IMMORTAL MOON** (fig. 6).

**Australia** (Djinang, Millingimbi, Wotjobaluk, Wuradjeri, Kulin, Yarra, Noongahburrah, Tiwi, Bibbulmun, Arunta, Wilman, Murngin, Yirrkalla, Maung), **Melanesia** (Fiji), **Micronesia** (Caroline Islands), **Assam** (Aka, Kachin), **South-East Asia** (Tjam), **Malaysia – Indonesia** (Semang, Kenya, Toradja), **Japan** (Miyako Islands), **Western Subarctic** (Carrier), **California** (Nisenan), **Guiana** (Hixkaryana), **Southern Venezuela** (Yanomami), **Southern Amazonia** (Iránxe), **Chaco** (Ayoreo).

#### **STRONG AND WEAK** (fig. 7).

**Malaysia – Indonesia** (Semang, Mentawai, Nias, Ngadju, Bahau, Dusun, Toradja, Mori, Balantak, Wemale), **Philippines** (Tboli), **Siberia** (Mansi, Western Tungus), **Japan** (Japanese, Ainu), **Eskimo** (Chugach), **Western Subarctic** (Ingalik, Koyukon, Upper Tanana, Athna, Tahltan), **NW Coast** (Tlingit, Tsimshian, Haida), **Eastern Subarctic** (Swampy Cree), **Plains** (Cheyenne), **Southern Venezuela** (Sanema, Yanomam), **Guiana** (Kaxúyana, Kariña, Trio), **Western Amazonia** (Shuar, Aguaruna), **Montaña** (Ashaninca, Machiguenga), **Southern Amazonia** (Kuikuru, Kamaiura, Bororo), **Eastern Brazil** (Caraja, Apanaye).

#### **STONE SINKS, STICK FLOATS** (fig. 8).

**Australia** (Noongahburrah), **Western Subarctic** (Tagish, Inner Tlingit, Tutchone, Kaska, Hare, Dogrib, Carrier), **Plains** (Blackfoot, Gros Ventre, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanchi, Kiowa-Apache), **Great Southwest** (Jicarilla, Western Apache, Chiricahua, Lipan), **Eastern Brazil** (Ramkokamekra, Botocudo).

#### **THE WRONG CALL** (fig. 9).

**Melanesia** (Baining), **Assam** (Aka), **Indonesia** (Dusun, Toradja), **the Southeast** (Choktaw), **Northern Andes** (Yupa), **Llanos** (Sicuaní), **Guiana** (Warao, Tamanak, Hixkaryana, Kariña, Locono, Trio), **Western and NW Amazonia** (Secoya, Mai Huna, Karijona, Ufaina, Letuama, Tucuna, Tucano proper), **Central Amazonia** (Teffé Lake; unidentified group), **Eastern Amazonia** (Shipaya), **Montaña** (Amuesha, Ashaninca, Cashinahua, Shipibo), **Southern Amazonia** (Kuikuru, Kamaiura), **Eastern Brazil** (Caraja, Apinaye).

#### **VENGEFUL COCKROACH** (fig. 10).

**Assam** (Wancho), **South-East Asia** (Banar), **Siberia** (Western Tungus), **NW Coast** (Haida), **Coast – Plateau** (Coos, Klamath), **the Southeast** (Choktaw, Seminole, Cherokee), **Great Southwest – NW Mexico** (Mohave, Papago, Seri, Tarahumara), **Mesoamerica** (Tepehua), **South Cone** (Tehuelche).

There is a noticeable tendency in the areal distribution of these six motifs. Being well represented across all the Indo-Pacific part of the Globe, they are almost completely absent in continental Eurasia. Only in Western and in adjacent part of Eastern Siberia two of the six motifs are known among the Mansi and Western Tungus (Evenk). These exceptions are not accidental. Western Siberian folklore and mythology always contain much greater number of Indo-Pacific motifs than any other region in Inner Eurasia. These motifs in Western Siberia often have close analogies at Chukotka, Kamchatka and the Lower Amur regions. It seems that formerly Siberian mythologies were mostly Indo-Pacific, though recently Tungus and especially Yakut migrations changed the picture in Eastern Siberia. The Tungus have preserved more elements of the folklore of the early substratum than the Yakut.

Another spectacular tendency in global distribution of the six motifs in question is that at least four of them (*shed skin*, *immortal Moon*, *stone sinks – stick floats*, *wrong call*) are known in Africa to the south of Sahara [Abrahamsson 1951; Frazer 1913: 60-83; Zhukov and Kotlyar 1976, nos. 16-19, 27]. Among other Indo-Pacific motifs which have their counterparts in Africa I can

name *Sun caught in snare* [Luomala 1940; 1965] and probably *Milky Way as a serpent* and *Demon sticks to person*. The African materials have not yet been processed by me systematically, but it does not seem that they contain many specific, easily identifiable motifs recorded elsewhere outside of this continent. The significant number of the "death" motifs in the small set of motifs shared by Africa to the south of Sahara and the non-African traditions deserves attention.

*The muddled message* (fig. 11) can also be included into this set of parallels. Besides Africa where it provides the most common explanation for the origin of death [Abrahamsson 1951: 4-34], it is connected with the same theme in **Assam** (Apa Tani), **Southeast Asia** (Viet), **Iran – Central Asia** (Tajik), **Baltic region** (Lithuanians), **Southern Siberia - Mongolia** (Altai, Khakas, Buryat, Mongol), **Western Siberia** (Hanty, Selkup, Ket), **Japan** (Miyako Islands, Ainu), possibly in **Mesoamerica** (Veracruz Nahuatl, Sierra Popoluca, Chol). It is connected with other aspects of human life in **Tibet** ("Tangut" of Chinghai province), **South-East Asia** (Tai), **India** (Bongo, Hill Saora, Parenga, Kond, Gond), **Lower Amur** (Oroch), **Chukotka** (Asiatic Eskimo), **Western Amazonia** (Napo), **Central Andes** (Kechua and Aimara of Highland Peru and Bolivia). However, this motif does not demonstrate specific links neither with Indo-Pacific nor with Continental Eurasian regions and possibly must be considered universal.

*The destiny of man discussed* is very popular in the New World in specific variant of *Originator of death the first sufferer* (two persons discuss people's fate; one insists that they should die forever; his child dies; he consents that human being might live forever but the original decision cannot be changed). This variant is widespread across North America but one South American and at least one (possibly much more) African cases are also known. Both in South America (Caduveo) and Africa (Fon) person's mother, not child, dies. Other variants which explain the mortal nature of man are recorded in **Melanesia** (Ambrim), **Indonesia** (Toradja), **Arctic** (Asiatic Eskimo, Western Greenland Inuit) and across both Americas, including **Eastern Brazil** (Ramkokamekra) and **Tierra del Fuego** (Yamana). In **Northern and Eastern Europe** (Lapps, Mari) and **Western Siberia** (Nenets, Hanty, Ket) other aspects of human existence are discussed.

The data on the areal distribution of the mythological motifs that have been presented here can be best explained if we accept the "Out-of-Africa" scenario suggested by the genetics [Oppenheimer 2003]. Three conclusions seem for me worth of further testing.

1. Anthropologically modern people had some mythology (and consequently the language adequate enough to retell the myths) already before they went beyond their African homeland.

2. The mortal nature of man was among the earliest (and possibly the very first) themes treated in myths.

3. The Indo-Pacific borderlands of Eurasia and Sahul were reached by groups moving along the coasts and preserving a significant part of their original culture. Later the elements of this culture were brought to Northern Asia and to the Americas. The peopling of continental Eurasia was accompanied by major changes in culture, especially during the Last Glacial Maximum. Much of the "pre-Out-of-Africa" mythology was lost and deformed as a result.

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## Illustrations

Fig. 1. Distribution of 574 motifs of group A (cosmology, etiology) across 230 areas. First principal component.

Fig. 2. Distribution of 659 motifs of group B (adventures, tricks) across 230 areas. First principal component.

Fig. 3. Distribution of 659 motifs of group B (adventures, tricks) across 230 areas. First principal component. Motifs related to gender and sex excluded.

Fig. 4. Distribution of 659 motifs of group B (adventures, tricks) across 230 areas. Second principal component.

Fig. 5. *Shed skin*: areal distribution of motifs.

Fig. 6. *Immortal Moon*: areal distribution of motifs.

Fig. 7. *Strong and weak*: areal distribution of motifs.

Fig. 8. *Stone sinks, stick floats*: areal distribution of motifs.

Fig. 9. *The wrong call*: areal distribution of motifs.

Fig. 10. Vengeful cockroach: areal distribution of motifs.

Fig. 11. *The muddled message*: areal distribution of motifs.