

## ***Chapter 7. Yi Jīng and West Asia: A partial vindication of Terrien de Lacouperie***

### **7.1 Introduction**

Throughout our argument so far we have come back to *Yi Jīng*, a classic Chinese wisdom text, the focus of a correlative system that contains a comprehensive cosmology addressing all aspects of human society and the universe, and that is expressed,

- in the first place in eight trigrams ('figures consisting of three superimposed lines', each line broken or unbroken), each with their own multidimensional meanings,
- and in the second place 64 combinations of two trigrams superimposed one upon the other – the hexagrams ('figures consisting of six superimposed lines'), with complex and dynamically shifting ('changing') correlative meanings.

When a random generator (a material apparatus producing highly specific and discrete chance outcomes, *e.g.* coins that are thrown, or numbered yarrow stalks that are cast) is coupled to a particular algorithm to translate the chance outcome into specifically one of the 64 combinations, and is interpreted by reference to a catalogue of divinatory meanings, *Yi Jīng* may be used as a powerful oracle, which during most of China's recorded history has compelled immense respect. *Yi Jīng* became known to Europe (*cf.* Smith 2012) as a result of the communications of Jesuit Christian missionaries working in China from the late 16th century onwards. The famous German mathematician and philosopher G.W. Leibniz (1646-1716 CE; Leibniz 1984), on the basis of Jesuits' reports from China, was the first to recognise the system's binary numerical implications.

The idea of an Ancient Mesopotamian origin of the Chinese people<sup>179</sup> and

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<sup>179</sup> According to Terrien this postulated people linking Ancient Mesopotamia to China, was named 百姓 'Bak Sing' – the attested (Cantonese) Chinese expression

of *Yi Jing* was launched, both in well-received lectures before the Royal Asiatic Society, London, and in numerous publications,<sup>180</sup> by the distinguished French-British Sinologist A.E.J.-B. Terrien de Lacouperie, who at the time of his untimely death from typhoid fever was professor of Indo-Chinese linguistics at University College London, one of the principal institutions of higher learning in the United Kingdom. In the present Chapter, after vindicating the stature of Terrien's scholarship and situating it in its own time and age, I will summarise his theory as to the Western origin of the Chinese people and of the *Yi Jing* in Ancient Mesopotamia, consider its weaknesses, and dismiss his reductionist view

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which until then was interpreted as meaning 'the [ foundational ] Hundred Families' of Ancient China' (cf. de Harlez 1895, where *po-hsing*). Terrien's proposal has been greatly ridiculed, yet its underlying principle is sound, and has a considerable comparative and theoretical foundation (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Ch. 2): when ethnonyms and toponyms travel, they are likely to be altered in accordance with the local phonology of the destination where they end up, and to be reinterpreted by popular etymology there (so one of the great challenges of ethnic history is to decipher the resulting puzzles). A strong indication that this is what happened lies in the fact that in the Bronze Age, the lexical equivalent of 百姓 would have been pronounced differently from Bak Sing (rather as *pāk seŋs*, Preclassic Old Chinese, cf. Starostin & Starostin, 1998-2008, 'Chinese characters' and 'Sino-Tibetan etymology'). The Armenologist Karst (1931a: 287) proposed to identify Terrien's (otherwise unattested) 'Bak (Sing)' with the attested Central Asian names 'Ketshi', 'Ketsü', 'Kotchi', 'Kütsché'. In passing, note the assonance with the personal name / ethnonym / place name Kush (according to *Genesis 10* a 'son' / division of ʕam, and – although ʕam in that connection is mainly associated with the African continent – significantly associated with Mesopotamia as the 'father / overarching unit' of Nimrod – the hunter, first king and (through his tower) challenger of Heaven. (Incidentally, Nimrod is the Mesopotamian counterpart of the Nkoya legendary king Kapesch whom we shall meet below, but the Nkoya name seems unrelated to the Central Asian cluster of names.) In such languages as 'Schrift-Oiratisch' of Western China, in Tuvan, and in Kalmuk, *ketsü* occurs with the meaning of 'hard, bold' (Poppe 1964: 204; Bayarma Khabtagaeva 2009: 43), from proto-Altaiic *\*k'et'ó*, with the same meaning, and with reflexes in Turkic, Mongolian, Tungus-Manchu, Korean and Japanese (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, s.v. 'Altaiic etymology'). In Japanese, moreover, *ketsü*, means 'blood' and also stands for a particular form of identity rhetoric. These semantics may produce plausible ethnonyms. Below we will find indications that the Terrien's postulated ethnonym may have belonged to a proto-Bantuoid-speaking cluster of West Asian Blacks, and if this makes sense, the \*original name may be analysed as [\*ba-]-\*Ksing, with \*ba- as plural personal prefix (as in Common Bantu), and \*Ksing close enough to 'Ketschi', 'Ketsü', 'Kotchi', 'Kütsché'. Werner (1984 / 1922: 13), while rejecting the identification of 百姓 with any similarly-sounding West or Central Asian ethnonym, accepts the possibility of an Akkadian or Khotan origin of Chinese civilisation.

<sup>180</sup> Terrien de Lacouperie 1880, 1882, 1887a, 1887b, 1888a, 1888b, 1890, 1892a, 1892b, 1894, 1897. For provisional bibliographies, cf. Anonymous 2012.

of the wholesale origin of the Chinese. However, I will also maintain that his point concerning the Western origin of *Yi Jing grosso modo* still stands, adducing new material to that effect.

## 7.2. The stature of Terrien de Lacouperie's scholarship

Apparently unfamiliar with the meaning of 'University College' in the London / United Kingdom context, the Japanese scholar Yoshihiro (2003) makes of Terrien an obscure scholar 'in the fringes of academic life' [ 'a mere college'...? – WvB ], allegedly 'only publishing in his own journal', *i.e. Babylonian & Oriental Record*.<sup>181</sup> Concerning Terrien's theory of decisive Mesopotamian influence on the rise of Chinese civilisation, and specifically of *Yi Jing*, Yoshihiro gives the impression that it has long been refuted. Characterisations such as 'fancyfull' [ *sic* ], 'fantasist', 'obscure', 'infamous', 'a failure', 'invented the Bak Sing tribes', 'speculative extremes', 'too sanguine speculation', 'ingenious but indigent [= 'poor']', etc. are also found in other, cursory reviews of Terrien as author of an external theory of the rise of Chinese civilisation.<sup>182</sup> More to the point and less anachronistic is the assessment by Blagden (1913), of Terrien as 'highly imaginative and brilliant, but not always reliable'.

Such unusually passionate qualifications do not sound as if their object is getting a fair deal – rather, as if the speakers have, in terms of ideology and self-interest, a chip on their shoulder. The truth is that Terrien, considering the relatively short span of his academic life, had an amazing output, and both phenomenal and surprisingly lasting success. Among his achievements we may count pioneering work in general linguistics, Chinese historical syntax, the identification of pre-Chinese languages of East

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<sup>181</sup> I am touchy on this point because similar accusations could be, and have been, levelled at myself. Of course, publishing in scholarly journals that one does not directly or (via old-boy ties) indirectly control, allows one's work to be objectively and critically assessed in the light of current standards of scholarship. For interdisciplinary and pioneering work this is not always an adequate solution. Moreover, we must avoid anachronisms on this point: the peer-reviewed scientific journal, instead of the book, only emerged as a dominant, even compelling, standard of scholarly quality in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, way after Terrien's time. What is more, publishing in one's own journal is sometimes a means to contribute to that journal's quality and continuity. Finally, looking at Terrien's enormous productivity I suspect, on the basis of personal parallels, that he chose the quickest publication venue with the least hurdles, simply to get things over and done with, and to have his hands free for the next challenge and the next text.

<sup>182</sup> Cordier 1895; Andrews 1925; Yetts 1925; Girardot 2005; Kroeber 1940; Armstrong 1945; Levenson & Schurmann 1969: 9; Rutt 2002 / 1996: 72; Leibold 2011.

Asia, decisive systematic work on East Asian numismatics, important contributions to the history of Buddhism and of South Asian, Central Asian and East Asian writing systems and scriptures, the ethnography and linguistic description of Formosa, the archaeology of Korea, explorations in Assyriology, and the first recognition of the striking similarities between the Indus valley and Easter Island (pseudo-)scripts. Famous and soon, posthumously, notorious<sup>183</sup> for his theory of the Ancient Mesopotamian indebtedness of Chinese civilisation, this was by no means his principal contribution to scholarship. No informed scholar would expect the fruits of Sinology and Assyriology from the 1880s to survive the confrontation with present-day knowledge, methods, and resources. However, quite unusual for linguists that have been dead for nearly 120 years, Terrien's pioneering work in the linguistic classification of the Sinosphere, and other scholarly achievements, continue to reverberate in authoritative specialist works of a later date, up to the present.<sup>184</sup>

Beyond the sphere of Western scholarship, and rather uniquely, and deservedly in recognition of Terrien's non-hegemonic worldview, his West Asian theory of Chinese origins (in other words, his theory of common origins shared by the Chinese and European civilisations) was eagerly received by influential Chinese scholars writing around 1900, and as a result the debate on, and with, Terrien de Lacouperie is still continuing in China, Japan, and Thailand to this very day,<sup>185</sup> while in the West his name has long been reduced, undeservedly, to mainly that of a bogeyman of pan-Babylonism *avant la lettre*.

With its predilection (very conspicuous in Martin Bernal, who prides himself in this trait) for now obscure authors once championing causes

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<sup>183</sup> For dismissive references to Terrien, cf. Brinton 1895; Cordier 1920: 21 f.; Bushell 1905 merely maintains that Terrien's theory 'has not been proven' – which strictly speaking may be said about *all* theories circulating in any of the humanities and social sciences.

<sup>184</sup> Approving citations of Terrien have appeared with the following authors: Pinches 1912; Hopkins 1916; Corney 1917; Charpentier 1919; Hopkins 1922; Maspero 1926; Ayrton & Silcock 1929 / 2003: 3 ('one authority (...) now somewhat discredited'); Yetts 1931, although Yetts's 1925 assessment of both Terrien and Ball was dismissive; de Hevesy 1938; Wiens 1949: 14; Hamilton 1954; Bartel 1958; and especially note the following *recent* positive citations: Jettmar 1983; West 1988; Egerod 1991; DeLancey 2010, 2012; Blench 2010.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Nakamura 1947; Dikötter 1990; Dufourmont 2006; Li Fan 2005, 2008; Hon 2007, 2010; Kyong-McClain 2010; Lin 1999; Feng 2005; Fong 2009.

that have meanwhile become counter-paradigmatic and potentially anti-hegemonic (e.g. Leo Frobenius), Afrocentrism has also identified Terrien de Lacouperie as a partisan (Rashidi 1988), transforming the latter's thesis in the following terms:

'One of the oldest oracles of antiquity, the *I-Ching* was constructed by the Black Akkado-Sumerians of Elam-Babylonia and is dated circa 2800 BCE'.

Brinton (1895) claimed that de Harlez, 'in Schlegel's [journal] *Archives d' Orient*' (more likely *T'oung Pao* is meant, cf. de Harlez 1896), had totally demolished Terrien's theory by exposing a faulty etymology and by adducing the alleged fact that

'presence of the true Mongolian race in the Euphrates valley in protohistory is fantasy'.<sup>186</sup>

This false claim of utter rejection has ever since been adopted by an increasing number of scholars, leading to the unverified, unreferenced truism it has become today. However, while rejecting Terrien's reductionist view of the wholesale Western origin of the Chinese people, we shall see that Terrien still has a point as far as *Yi Jing* is concerned. Moreover Rashidi – like so often in the case of Afrocentrism – has more of a point than one would be inclined to give him credit for, even though his expression 'the Black Akkado-Sumerians of Elam-Babylonia' does unmistakable violence to Terrien's original, and probably also to ethnic and somatic realities in West Asia in the Early Bronze Age – and yet deserves to be taken seriously.

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<sup>186</sup> Brinton's triumphalist claim is ironic for a number of reasons. Shamanism, most probably transmitted on the wings of Uralic, Altaic and Indo-European speakers' horse-riding and chariot technology hailing from West to Central Asia, did penetrate Mesopotamia in the second millennium BCE, and below (footnote 252) we shall indicate some of its apparent traces. A claim of West Asian influence, even provenance, for 'the Chinese people' (or rather: *for a minute population fragment contributing to the massive and heterogeneous Chinese people*) does not mean presence of any 'true Mongolian race' (an obsolete misconception anyway by today's genetics standards, which reject the concept of race wholesale; Brace *et al.* 1993; Montagu 1974) in Mesopotamia, but merely the transfer of cultural traits from West to East – for which, again, the Steppe has been providing excellent opportunities for millennia (Witzel 2009) – as well as for the counter-movement East-West (cf. Needham with Ling 1961, vol. I). As we have seen above, Sino-Caucasian may be considered a macrophylum massively spoken in West Asia and the Mediterranean (including the Franco-Cantabrian region) into the Bronze Age. And so strikingly 'Mongoloid' were some of these West Asian presences that early scholarly studies of the Hittites attributed a Turanic / Mongoloid nature to them on the basis of their iconographic self-depictions in stone (Conder 1898, 1909, 1915). Turan is a name for Central Asia.

### 7.3. Terrien de Lacouperie on a wholesale West Asian origin of the Chinese people

Terrien wrote in the shaky formative decades of Assyriology, and a quarter of a century before the establishment of pan-Babylonism, *i.e.* the short-lived scholarly theory (no doubt in part inspired by Terrien) according to which *all* civilisation world-wide originated in Ancient Mesopotamia (*cf.* Winckler 1903, 1907). Terrien's main arguments were:

- more or less superficial correspondences (also *cf.* Ball 1913) between formal characteristics of isolated script signs in China and Mesopotamia  
*but meanwhile both Assyriology and Sinology have progressed tremendously, and the oracular bones and other archaeological sources have yielded much older forms, apparently of local origin, of Chinese script than available to Terrien and Ball;*
- onomastic parallels  
*which are notoriously multi-interpretable;*
- mythological parallels *e.g.* concerning the Flood  
*but Flood myths are globally so widespread<sup>187</sup> that they do not prove much of a specific Mesopotamian-Chinese connection;*
- his personal reconstruction of (what appeared) a trans-Asiatic migration from West to East Asia by an unattested 'Bak Sing' ethnic group, linking up with the tradition of China's 百姓 'Hundred Families'  
largely vindicated in note 179, above;
- and also what should still count as impressive in the eyes of Modern scholarship: correspondences between Ancient Mesopotamian and Ancient Chinese king lists.<sup>188</sup>

As far as specifically *Yi Jīng* is concerned, Terrien rejected the dominant tradition (in the Western scholarship of his time represented by James Legge) that considered the *Yi Jīng* and its extensive commentaries to

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<sup>187</sup> *E.g.* Dundes 1988; Witzel 2010; van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008.

<sup>188</sup> Modern scholarship still greatly relies on the matching on king lists, *e.g.* this is a major argument for Dierk Lange (2009, 2012) when claiming major and direct Assyrian influence upon West Africa, c. 600 BCE.

constitute one unified corpus. Thirty years later the prominent Sinologist H.A. Giles (1915: 5 *f.*) summarised Terrien's argument in the following terms:

'The foreign student is disappointed when he comes to a study of the *Canon of Changes* [ = a literal rendering of the title *Yi Jīng* ]; partly because of the exaggerated value set upon its contents by native scholars of all ages, and partly from an inability to penetrate its labyrinthine mysteries and seize the hidden spirit of the book. It has been alleged by Chinese enthusiasts that, if you have only the wit to seek, you will find in the *Canon of Changes* the germs of all the great scientific discoveries; on the other hand, it was reserved for two foreign students (Sir R. Douglas [ *cf.* Douglas 1893 – WvB ] and Terrien de Lacouperie) to put their heads together and publicly announce that this work, regarded in China as based on a divine revelation, is *nothing more than a vocabulary of an obscure Central Asian tribe* [ *sc.* the Bak Sing – WvB ] — *so obscure indeed that to this day it remains unlocated and unknown*. A translation of the *Canon of Changes* was made by Dr Legge,<sup>189</sup> the greatest Chinese scholar of modern times at the day of his death. Dr Legge thought that he had "found the key", but it is doubtful if anyone else has ever shared with him that opinion.' (my italics – WvB)

The most nuanced present-day negative assessment of Terrien's wholesale thesis is perhaps that of oracle-bone specialist D.N. Keightley (Keightley & Barnard 1983: x *f.*; *cf.* Keightley 1978), who rather than denouncing Terrien's impressive scholarship, advances a number of reasons why the latter's theory should be rejected:

- a) lack of archaeological support;
- b) excessive trust in late Chinese texts ;
- c) reliance on the argument *post hoc ergo propter hoc* ('B followed A in time therefore A is the cause of B');
- d) inability to distinguish between proper genetic connection and coincidence, and
- e) an exogenous, external, instead of endogenous and spontaneous, conception of cultural innovation.

Still, even though negative, this is very far from conclusive. While con-

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<sup>189</sup> Legge 1882, where the signs of his controversy with Terrien de Lacouperie are to be found at p. 18 *f.* The latter had declared that Legge's was 'not a translation but a mere paraphrase'. Legge in his turn retorted that Terrien showed no understanding whatsoever of the meaning of *Yi Jīng*, implying that an attempt like Terrien's, to re-contextualise that sacred Chinese text in West Asia *i.e.* outside the habitual realm of the Sinosphere, can only amount to a destruction of its original, inherent meaning.

ceding (b) (the short oracle-bone texts on which Keightley's own research focused were at least one millennium older than anything available to Terrien), we note



Source: Seligmann n.d.: Fig. 11, p. 32; Kircher 1652-1655

Fig. 7.1. An Early Modern representation of Dagon / Oannes, loosely based on Ancient Graeco-Roman and Biblical sources (the Mesopotamian sources had not yet been explored at the time)

- that it is a gross distortion of facts to deny (Keightley's point (a)) all archaeological support for Terrien's thesis. In this connection we may point to such standard textbook examples as: the Neolithic and Bronze Age continuity, across the Eurasian Steppe, of pottery, agricultural implements (Leser 1928), animal style art (Rostovzев 1929), spoked chariot,<sup>190</sup> the Altaic linguistic phylum covering the entire Eurasian Steppe region from Anatolia to Korea and Japan, the comparative study of divination,<sup>191</sup> and mythological concepts (e.g. snake-footed divine figures such as Fu Xi, Nü Wa, Ancient

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<sup>190</sup> van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 382 and *passim*, with references.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Oppenheim 1966: 37, to whom we shall return below.



Greek Cecrops and Erichthonius,<sup>192</sup> and apparently cognate fish-tailed figures such as Oannes – with cognates Basque Basojaun, Italic Janus, Indian Ganesh – mentioned by the Hellenistic writer Berossus.<sup>193</sup> There is, in other words, the evidence in favour of continuity not only from archaeology but also from fields not mentioned by Keightley: linguistics, comparative historical ethnography and iconography, and comparative mythology),<sup>194</sup> also see the next sections of the present Chapter.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> The controversial Assyriologist Temple (1976) seeks the missing link, in space and time, between Erichthonius and Fu Xi in the Sumerian mythical figure Oannes, likewise alleged to combine an aquatic nature with the status of culture hero. Temple invokes the intervention of an extraterrestrial civilisation to account for the (late!) myth of Oannes as bringer of the Sumerian civilisation (attested only in Hellenistic times), and for the alleged superior knowledge of the Dogon people of Mali concerning the composite nature of the star Sirius (*α Canis Major A, B*) – the Dogon's alleged knowledge is probably a total artefact, based on Griaule & Dieterlen's (1965) mishandling of Dogon ethnography and mythology, and its subsequent New Age misappropriation. Knowledge of the composite nature of Sirius goes back to Wilhelm Bessel and his contemporaries towards the middle of the 19th century, and among the Dogon could easily be attributed to terrestrial European civilisation, given the existence, between 1850 and 1930, of astronomical expeditions into West Africa, and the general circulation of astronomical knowledge among educated Europeans visiting that part of the world. A further argument for my dismissive claim is the number of satellites that, in the same kind of argument, is spuriously attributed to the prodigious astronomical knowledge of West Africans: nearly a dozen, which does not reflect the actual number (of several dozens) now upheld by state-of-the-art astronomy, but merely reflects the consensus among North Atlantic professional astronomers around 1900. Cf. Thomas *et al.* 1983; Soderblom & Johnson 1982; Hamilton 1995-2011. Also cf. 18th-century authors struggling with the identification of only a handful of Saturnine satellites: Pound 1753; Herschel 1790. I am indebted to a conversation with V.Y. Mudimbe, Leiden, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2005, for challenging me to develop this point.

<sup>193</sup> Schnabel 1923; Jacoby 1923-1927: Fragment 680; Cory 1828; Burstein 1978; Verbrugge & Wickersham 1996.


<sup>194</sup> Also in comparative mythology the Mesopotamian / Chinese link has been backed up: Mori Masako 1995, 2009, cf. p. 243, below; moreover, I found that West Eurasian leopard-skin themes around the Greek god Dionysus have parallels in Ancient Chinese army ranks and the royal chariot (I am indebted to Dr Haifang Lui, 西亚非洲研究所 Institute of West Asian and African Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences IWAAS, Beijing, for retrieving this information for me from Chinese historical sources).

<sup>195</sup> An additional line of argument could be the following. There is a marked dualism underlying Yi Jing, both in its mathematical structure (like in the case of other geomancies, the number of its basic configurations is 2<sup>n</sup>) and in the implied reliance on the 陰陽 *Yin / Yang* distinction. Schmidt (1933) proposed to interpret this as an echo

- that (c), the argument *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, although admittedly risky and patently insufficient to build a fully-fledged theory upon, is an obvious and ubiquitous *first* step in the formulation of historical *hypotheses* – although, admittedly, never the final step in their substantiation;
- while (d) (the distinction between proper genetic connection and coincidence) and (e) (the distinction between exogenous, external, instead of endogenous and spontaneous, conception of cultural innovation) inevitably spring, not directly from the quality of the available evidence nor from the quality of a specific theory at hand, but depend on something far more optional and transient, notably: the wider, overarching paradigmatic framework in the light of which a particular theory is being judged – these two points of criticism, therefore, are matters of scholarly appreciation and opinion, and therefore cannot be counted as *errors* but must simply be considered points of scholarly disagreement.

In other words, although there is an unmistakably quixotic element involved in my present attempt to defend Terrien de Lacouperie as the respectable scholar he was, and to take up the case of his external theory once more, we need to treat with the greatest reservation the present-day contention that his theory of a West Asian origin of the Chinese system has been conclusively refuted. The problem with claims of trans-continental continuities is that they tend to be taken too literally and too

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of Persian dualism, anciently in the form of the opposition between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, and in Late Antiquity most conspicuous in the teachings of the Irani-Syriac prophet Mani (Flügel 1862; Ort 1967; Reeves 1992; Runciman 1969; Scheftelowitz 1922; Widengren 1961, 1965). Various authors (Widengren 1949; Lieu 1994) have stressed Mani's continuity, not only with Ancient Iran but also with Ancient Mesopotamia. Interestingly, Clermont-Ganneau (1900) cites a 9th-c-CE Syriac work claiming Pythagoras and Empedocles as Mani's predecessors. The battle between light and darkness plays an important role in shamanism (as for instance expressed in shamanic clothing; Willis 1994: 108), and particularly in Iranian religion, Judaism around the beginning of the Common Era (where the struggle between 'the Children of Light' and 'the Children of Darkness' is a major theme), an early Manichaeism (Woschütz *et al.* 1989; Stuip & Vellekoop 1989), from where it exerted a considerable influence on Islam and medieval Christianity. This reminds us that, as we have seen above, in the oldest forms of *Yi Jīng* notational system, black / filled and white / open circles took the place later taken by broken and unbroken lines – in implied reference to the well-known symbolism of *Yin / Yang*: .

comprehensively, in a 'winner takes all' way: as if the mere claim

- A has had *some specific* influence upon B,

were identical to the claim that

- B has been *totally determined* by A and by A alone.<sup>196</sup>

One thing that comes through in our most recent endeavours to map and interpret transcontinental continuities of a different kind, notably those between Asia and sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>197</sup> is that they may be considered part of a *multi-centred* and *multidirectional* prehistoric and protohistoric system of exchanges (*cf.* Fig. 2.17, above), in which an emerging global maritime network played an increasing role. In other words, transcontinental continuities influences may be complex, may come from different directions, and may operate in more than one direction. One-factor totalising theories of transcontinental continuities (including Terrien's) therefore may never be adequate. But that does not mean that at the level, not of wholesale pronouncement about a total people and its culture, but at the level of the analysis of specific individual traits, all thoughts of transcontinental continuities (*e.g.* Terrien's intuition of letting *Yi Jing* come from West Asia) have to be banned as automatically, inherently, spurious.

#### **7.4. Recent support for the view of a West Asian origin of *Yi Jing***

I was still largely unaware of the work of Terrien de Lacouperie except for his 1882 Letter to the Editor, and apparently an echo of his work in

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<sup>196</sup> The Biblical Exodus story is a case in point: unmistakably there has been such massive Ancient Egyptian cultural and religious influence upon Ancient Israel (Görg 1997 and his entire, multi-volume series *Fontes atque pontes: Reihe Ägypten und Altes Testament*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz) that the idea of *some* (probably very limited) population migration from Egypt north to Palestine, possibly led by an Egyptian prince / magical specialist by the purely Egyptian name of *Mosis*, is quite plausible; but that is a very different proposition from the naïve Jewish and Christian perception of the Early Iron Age population of Palestine, and of the edifice of Israelite religion in that period, *as largely or even totally deriving from such a migration*.

<sup>197</sup> *Cf.* the International Conference 'Rethinking African's transcontinental continuities in pre- and protohistory', Leiden, African Studies Centre 2012, and my various texts presented in that connection.

my personal communications with the Sinologist Martin Bernal (1996) concerning the possible Indo-European etymology of the fundamental eight trigram names in *Yi Jīng*,<sup>198</sup> when I, too, ended up with Giles' puzzle: *if there was to be claimed continuity between West Asia and China, then who specifically has been involved, which West Asian ethnic group? situated where? speaking which language?* With the aid of long-range historical linguistics, I will be able (in the manner set out in detail in Section 7.6, below) to suggest an answer for at least one of the trigram names: *kun* 坤, 'earth' (belonging to the trigram ☷), without obvious Sino-Tibetan etymology, is likely to derive from some Indo-European source – which I have meanwhile identified as proto-Hittite or proto-Greek spoken in the Aegean-Anatolian region in the Early to Middle Bronze Age: not exactly Ancient Mesopotamia but still West Asia and a region that has been recognised to have been influenced, in many ways (religion, mythology, science, technology), by Ancient Mesopotamia and by West Asia in general.

As already indicated in footnote 186, above, the apparent truism that no Mongolians ever lived in West Asia must not be taken at face value, either. Initial appearances, although ultimately mistaken, already suggested otherwise: Prior to Hrozný's decipherment (1917) of the Hittite script and language as Indo-European,<sup>199</sup> on the basis of their self-images

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<sup>198</sup> In my first extensive treatments of the transcontinental connections of geomancies and *mankala* board games (van Binsbergen 1995a, 1997b), written when I was still barely aware of such long-range approaches in linguistics, genetics, archaeology, mythology and ethnography as were then already gaining momentum in the international literature but for which nothing in my formal training at the University of Amsterdam had prepared me, let alone the attending methodologies, I was impressed by Martin Bernal's remark, in his original capacity of Sinologist (personal communication, 1996), to the effect that 坤 *kūn* (cf. Table 7.1, below), the eighth trigram ☷ in *Yi Jīng*, commonly interpreted as 'the receptive field, the earth', had no Sino-Tibetan etymology and had been equated, 'by one [unspecified] author now obsolete', with Ancient Greek χθών *hthōn*, likewise meaning 'Earth', thus conveying the suggestion of a non-Chinese, possibly Indo-European origin of the *Yi Jīng* system – as would be compatible with the discovery, a century ago, of Tocharian A and B as far eastern extensions of the Indo-European language family. As we shall see in the course of this Chapter, Bernal's observation was probably an unreferenced reflection of Terrien de Lacouperie's work; more important, Terrien's idea as mediated by Bernal was able to stand the test of state-of-the-art long-range comparative linguistics.

<sup>199</sup> Which, of course, says little about the Hittites' somatic and genetic makeup. Cf. the fact that, as a result of Tsarist Russian expansion in the 18th-19th c. CE, many

in iconography the Hittites tended to be identified as Chinese or Turanic, especially in the context of Bible studies.<sup>200</sup> The Armenologist Karst (1931a) believed to perceive such extensive influence of Chinese on West Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean that he proposed a Chinese etymology for the place name and ethnonym *Ethiopia(n)* – very common in the Mediterranean Bronze Age....<sup>201</sup> This is all totally obsolete scholarship now. However, we are on more secure ground when in a recent synthesis prominent linguists claimed extensive Sino-Caucasian (conceivably including Sino-Tibetan < Chinese) presence for the Northern shore of the Mediterranean up to the Late Bronze Age (McCall & Fleming 1999).

Of course, archaeological and epigraphical work of the last hundred years has led to the recognition of the non-mythical nature of the earliest Chinese dynasties, which therefore have become roughly contemporary to the early dynasties of Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. Like present-day scholars in India and Japan, and Africa, and in emulation, *mutatis mutandis*, of an inveterate, Eurocentric European tradition, modern Chinese scholars now prefer a predominantly endogenous model for the origin of their national and regional civilisation; they are no longer flattered – like leading Chinese intellectuals were a hundred years ago – to be granted, in Ancient Mesopotamia, a common cultural prehistory with the West – a thought whose obvious anti-hegemonic implications their present-day Chinese counterparts seem to overlook,<sup>202</sup> or which they are tempted to

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Asians of widely different somatic and genetic makeup now speak the Indo-European language of Russian as their mother tongue; and a similar argument can be made for South Americans speaking Spanish, or sub-Saharan Africans speaking English, French or Afrikaans – all of them Indo-European languages.

<sup>200</sup> Bible scholars took an interest because, in the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity, repeated reference is made to ‘Hittites’, which name therefore was adopted for the people and polity associated with the name Ḫatti and the location of Boğazköy, Anatolia. *Genesis* 10, moreover, contains several mentions of the enigmatic *Sinim*, which some scholars have identified as Sinoid in the present-day sense, cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Ch. 11, *passim*, see that book’s Index of Proper Names.

<sup>201</sup> Albeit, regrettably, on the basis of *modern* Chinese forms 海汀 *hai tīng* ‘sea island’, and not the proper archaic ones *smā? thēŋ* (Preclassic Old Chinese; Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, ‘Chinese characters’); thus, Karst’s suggestion as to the Chinese etymology of *Ethiopia*- clearly turns out to be spurious.

<sup>202</sup> What could be more anti-Eurocentric than the admission that the Western colonial-

replace by their own implicitly hegemonic regional chauvinism of today, and of all times.

Anyway, regardless of these considerations of hegemony in the politics of the production of history, in a scenario that makes Chinese origins contemporary to those of Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt (and that, moreover, recognises the Bronze Age's state of proto-globalisation hence massive multidirectional and multicentred transregional contacts), there is, admittedly, no longer room for Terrien de Lacouperie's thesis that Chinese civilisation derived lock, stock and barrel from Ancient Mesopotamia as we have come to know it since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> c. CE.

But, again, that does not rule out the likelihood of more limited transmissions of knowledge in the course of the Bronze Age, when horse and chariot technology, and nautical technology, presented the material conditions for extensive transcontinental exchanges – and when the results of such exchanges are emphatically clear from the correspondences between formal cultural systems in these various regions. On the basis of the extensive empirical material and analysis presented in Section 7.6 below, there is certainly *some* truth in Terrien's point stands that *Yi Jīng*, and its constituent symbolism of eight named trigrams (八卦 *pa gua*), may have been among such eastbound transfers from West Asia.

### **7.5. Rashidi's Afrocentrist perspective concerning the origin of *Yi Jīng***

This brings us to Rashidi's Afrocentrist point. It should be enough to offer a controversial partial vindication of Terrien de Lacouperie's controversial theory concerning the West Asian origin of *Yi Jīng*, and I should be content to leave the matters at this. However, and once again, the perception of transcontinental continuities depends not so much on proper data, but on an overarching paradigm admitting or denying the possibility of such transcontinental continuities. Scholarly paradigms reflect power relations between regions, classes, ethnic groups, within the World System. Shifts in such paradigms often reflect shifts in these

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ists and imperialists share crucial cultural origins with the Asian populations that were the object of the former's expansionism, – and that those origins were not even located in Europe but in Asia? Here a reading of the Sinologist's Bernal's *Black Athena* (1987) would still be illuminating.

power relations. Since the 1990s I have repeatedly championed the cause of Afrocentricity. This was not (*pace* Amselle 2001) in order to curry favour with my African friends and colleagues (although it did in fact endear me with them). Nor was it an attempt at Political Correctness, verbally compensating Africans as recognised and self-acclaimed victims of recent global history, by offering them the mere illusion of a glorious past. My defence of Afrocentricity also had to do with my awareness that once peripheral, subjugated or excluded groups – with whom I, admittedly, do identify, by birth, choice, and adoption – *may* have preserved, in their own specific worldviews, knowledge of historical facts and relationships which otherwise have been expelled from collective consciousness by the hegemonic paradigms of dominant groups in the World System. Until yesterday these were the dominant, White, educated inhabitants of the North Atlantic region; and today and tomorrow these may well be Chinese, Indian, and Brazilian elites. Therefore, in the final stages of my twenty-years research project to bring to light the submerged history of geomantic divination, in Africa, East Asia (where it manifests itself as *Yi Jing*), and globally, I think I should take the risk of alienating my readers still further, and take the following step.

I suggested that Afrocentricity may contain and reveal dissimulated facts surreptitiously preserved in particularist group memory, while otherwise eclipsed from global memory under the influence of dominant, elite-associated paradigms. One such ‘fact’ appears to be the existence, in the Neolithic and Bronze Age, of a highly pigmented ethnic cluster in West Asia, displaying many cultural traits (including proto-geomancy, early metallurgy, a fire cult, solar cult, and a rudimentary element cosmology, etc.) and some genetic traits, which I have provisionally designated as ‘Pelagian’,<sup>203</sup> and apparently surfacing to historical attestation or attribution in widely distant contexts, including:

- the Caucasus (Herodotus, *Historiae*, IV.140; Armayor 1978, 1980; Jairazbhoy 1985),
- Ancient Mesopotamia (Nimrod as displaced son (situated not in North East Africa but in Mesopotamia) of Kush son of ʕam; *Gene-*

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<sup>203</sup> For a list of these traits and a provisional overview of their distribution, see van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 374 *f.*

*sis* 10;<sup>204</sup>

- South Asia (Dravidian speakers – usually considered, like Sinhalese, to have a West Asian origin – and further perhaps Vedda, Semang, possibly also continuous with population elements in New Guinea and Australia some of which are traced to South Asia);
- isolated parts of the Mediterranean (Homer’s Sintiēs, *Iliad* I, 594, XVIII, 394; *Odyssey* VIII, 294 – their close association with the Fire and metallurgical god Hephaestus (whose name probably<sup>205</sup> derives from \*proto-Berber \**hifau*, ‘fire’) suggest them to be early iron workers, reminiscent of their latter-day namesakes the Sinti (and Roma) known also by the outsider-imposed name of Gypsies; here particularly attention is called to another outlying cluster, like Kush, associated, in *Genesis* 10, with Ḥam: Ludim (‘Lydians / Carians / Lycians’), as ‘descendants’ of the Mizraim (‘Egyptians’),<sup>206</sup> – as descendants of Ḥam, for it is from a volcanic spot in Lycia that the cult of Hephaestus is claimed to originate;<sup>207</sup> perhaps also Ligurians and Elymians; Sergi 1901), possibly also the Maghreb, and the Mesolithic Eastern Iberian peninsula (rock paintings of honey collecting, and microliths, suggesting Khoisanoid presence; cf. Bandi & Maringer 1952);
- Ancient Ireland (‘Black Irish’, Fomorians);
- blacksmiths throughout the western Old World, as outsiders associated not only with magical power and fire but also with high levels of skin pigmentation, in other words blackness.
- probably South Central Africa where they are associated with the Bantu sub-phylum of the Niger-Congo phylum, traces of which have been detected in the West Asian specifically Palestinian Bronze Age (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 81 f.);
- as well as South West Asia and isolated pockets in East Africa (Khoisan speakers, Hadza, Sandawe), where populations are found

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<sup>204</sup> Van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Ch. 6 analyses *Genesis* 10 from an ethnic studies perspective; Karst (1931a) shows a Cushitic substrate in European toponyms.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen, in preparation (b); *contra* Blažek 2010.

<sup>206</sup> The Egyptian link with South West Anatolia was not only acknowledged in *Genesis* 10, but also played an important role during the Sea Peoples episode of the Egyptian New Kingdom, when grain transports from Egypt were to quench a famine on the other side of the Mediterranean, in defiance of Hittite control of Anatolia. Cf. Barnett 1953, 1987.

<sup>207</sup> Maximus Tyrius 1804: II, 194, *Dissertatio* 38.



that are only moderately pigmented and whose admittedly great genetic distance from other present-day populations (Patterson 2010) does not preclude Cavalli-Sforza's point (based however on classic genetic markers and not on state-of-the-art molecular biology) that part of their ancestors still lived in West Asia 10 ka BP (Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994; *pace* Vigilant *et al.* 1989, 1991). The West Asian Pre-Pottery Neolithic constitutes a part of the world and a period where, I submit, archaeological signs of their presence can be picked up (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 85 *f.*) in the form of a prehistoric depiction of elongated *labia minora*,<sup>208</sup> perhaps ostrich shell beads,<sup>209</sup> round-plan dwellings soon to be replaced (Hawkes *c.s.* 1977: 59), in the archaeological record, by square-plan ones.

Both the Sumerian (Kramer 1959: 72 and *passim*) and the Chinese self-identification (黎民 *li min*) was in the puzzling terms of 'the black-headed people' – another indication of the plausibility of an attenuated version of Terrien's claim, to the effect of *some* Chinese-Mesopotamian continuity but moreover with the added value of drawing our attention to unexpected Chinese / Mesopotamian / 'Black' / 'African' connections. Despite Rashidi's failure to substantiate his claim by proper scholarship (as is so often the case with Afrocentrists), his suggestion to situate the origin of the *Yi Jing* system in this largely forgotten or dissimulated

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<sup>208</sup> Depicted at the site of Göbekli Tepe, Pre-Pottery Neolithic B, Anatolia (8800-8000 BCE), Landesmuseum 2007; *cf.* discussion in van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 84 *f.* Whether natural or as a result of deliberate and prolonged stretching as a cultural practice (specialists are not yet in agreement on this point; *cf.* Montagu 2010), the 'Khoisan apron' of elongated *labia minora* has been associated with Khoisan-speaking populations of Southern Africa ever since these attracted the Western scientific gaze. As a result of this cultural practice and not of genetic disposition, the adult female genitals of many Bantu-speaking groups in Southern and South Central Africa have taken the same shape. Outside Africa, the practice is rarely recorded. Yet the idea of a prehistoric West to Central Asian origin is suggested – given the reconstructed dispersal pattern of human populations out of Africa since the Middle Palaeolithic – by the fact that the 'winged' or 'butterfly' vulva is a recognised, sporadic trait in China and Japan, while the concept is even attested (as a verbal insult) among Native Americans; *cf.* van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 85 *f.* and references there.

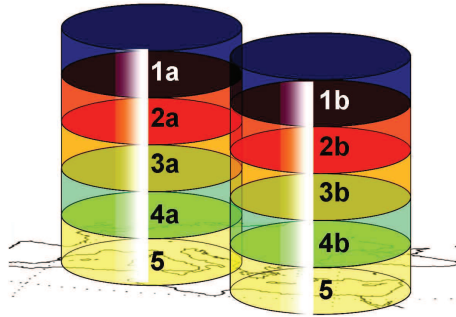
<sup>209</sup> However, these artefacts have such a long history since the Middle Palaeolithic that contrary to common belief they are not enough to archaeologically identify Khoisan speakers by; *cf.* Bednarik 1993.

cluster of West Asian ‘Blacks’ reminds us of the fact that simple proto-geomancies are found throughout the Pelasgian realm, in whose westerly extension (towards the Mediterranean) a significant role appears to be played by highly pigmented West Asians, associated with at least some of the constituents elements towards the Bantu linguistic sub-phylum – including the oldest attestation of \*proto-Bantu (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 83 *f.*).

This may sound promising, but an important objection would of course be that, if at least part of the trigram names in *Yi Jing* are considered to be reflexes from some Indo-European, notably proto-Hittite or proto-Greek Anatolian root, it is not clear how a widely dispersed, highly-pigmented population originating from West Asia and *associated with \*proto-Bantu and perhaps other African linguistic macrophyla such as Khoisan*, could be held responsible for transmitting such lexical elements to East Asia. Here a closer look at the layered ethnico-linguistic situation in the Mediterranean / West Asia in the Bronze Age (Fig. 7.2)<sup>210</sup> may provide the answer. Contrary to common belief the ethnic and linguistic situation in that part of the world during the Bronze Age was – according to Karst’s 1931a somewhat dated reconstruction, which I have tried to update and develop – not characterised by clearly demarcated, ethnically and linguistically homogeneous population groups. It already displayed traits of proto-globalisation in that, both in the eastern and in the western parts of the Mediterranean, populations were ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous, in a layered way that reflected the local (pre-) history of the succession of ethnico-linguistic specificities – the older layers, also somatically more highly pigmented, being relegated to the lowest social status, the most recent layers, composed of Indo-European and Afro-asiatic speakers, constituting an aristocratic exploitative class. Our postulated cluster of West Asian Blacks appears to have been associated not only with one or more of the earliest trigram names (of Indo-European provenance but circulating throughout the heterogeneous local population cluster) but also with metallurgy, and conceivably the trigram names were part of a correlative cosmology that enshrined the secrets of early blacksmiths where they spread their craft throughout the Old World.

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<sup>210</sup> From van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Fig. 4.8, p. 96.



	linguistic (macro-) phylum	Constituent ethno-linguistic groups		remarks
		Western Mediterranean	Eastern Mediterranean	
<i>Secondary Pelasgians are typically found in this row</i>	<b>1. Indo-European (a) satem group; (b) kentum group</b>	1a. Secondary Ibero-Ligurians, Caphthor / Caslukhim (with an Indo-European speaking ruling class) in Spain, Sicanians, Tyrreno-Tuscans, proto-Illyrians	1b. Secondary (Illyro-) Pelasgians (including pre-Israelite Pherisites, Secondary Philistines, Numidian Persae) Secondary Leleges, Caphthor / Caslukhim (with a partly Indo-Aryan ruling class) ≈ Carians, Alarodians (= Caucasian speakers)	aristocratic top layer  this layer manifests itself particularly as that of a semi-Indo-European language form associated with a local dominant class
<i>Primary Pelasgians are typically found in these rows</i>	<b>2. Afroasiatic ('Hamito-Semitic' / 'Hamitic')</b>	2a. Jaccetani, Rhaetians, Rasenna, Rutenu <i>i.e.</i> Afroasiaticised Sicanians	2b. Secondary Leleges. NB. In so far as Cushitic, this Afroasiatic element is often 3rd millennium <i>i.e.</i> older than '3. (proto-) Basquoid'	
	<b>3. (proto-) Basquoid</b>	3a Western Mediterranean: Basquoids, Ibero-Sicanians	3b. Eastern Mediterranean: Liguroid or Eastern Basquoid Leleges	
	<b>4. Caucasian</b>	4a. In the Western Mediterranean this layer is inconspicuous, its place seems to remain largely occupied by '5. Complex substrate of Ligurian': Liguroid pre-Euscarian groups: Opici, Opsci, Sicani, Ausci, proto-Basques	4b (Eastern Mediterranean). Abkhazoids (pre-Leleges, Teleges, Telchines, Tubal peoples)	
	<b>5. Complex substrate of Ligurian</b>	if interpreted in the light of the state-of-the-art *Borean Hypothesis (which was not yet available to Karst), this layer comprises fragmented presences of Sino-Caucasian, and of branches of Eurasiatic / Nostratic notably Uralic, Altaic and Dravidian; and also of Khoisan, Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo / Bantu		archaic popular bottom layer / substrate

From: van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Fig. 4.8, p. 96; source for tabulation and diagram: Karst 1931a

Fig. 7.2. Layered ethno-linguistic complexity of the Bronze Age Mediterranean.

The idea of a submerged, collectively denied substratum of excluded, discarded Black people (ultimately expelled to the fringes of the Old World: sub-Saharan Africa, Southernmost South Asia, and Australia / New Guinea?) may also come some way towards explaining why an inveterate, old and widespread racialism appears to be a major factor in the obliteration of transcontinental continuities, not only between Africa and Asia but also (like in the present case of *Yi Jing*) across Eurasia: such continuities imply association with, even cultural indebtedness to, Blacks with whom the (lowly pigmented, increasingly Indo-European-speaking) groups dominant in Eurasia during the last few millennia did not and do not wish to be identified. The idea, admittedly, smacks enough of Political Correctness to arouse suspicion. Yet it has enough empirical plausibility not to be smothered in prejudice.

## **7.6. Trying to identify the cradle of the Old World transformation cycle of elements on the basis of the nomenclature of the *pa gua* (eight trigrams)**

### 7.6.1. Comparative historical linguistics of the eight-trigrams nomenclature

A substantial scholarly literature has built up which throws light on the many parallels between the Presocratic four-element system from Ionia / *Graecia Magna* (Southern Italy), and the cosmologies of other Eurasian regions. Several authors have stressed the continuities with West Asia, foremost Kingsley (1995a, 1995b). Already Przulski (1938) has brought out the parallels between Empedocles and what he claims to be the Zoroastrian pattern. Kaliff (2007) has opened an Indo-European perspective connecting the Ancient Scandinavian cosmological and ritual system (hinging on ‘Fire, Water, Heaven and Earth’) with the entire Indo-European world, including the Presocratics but also West and South Asia. Still from an Indo-European-Studies point of view, Franklin (2002) has stressed the continuity between Empedocles’ and Indo-Iranian cosmology – in both the concept of harmony is crucial (*cf.* Lambropoulou 1998). A similar Iranian influence was detected by Burkert (1963) in Anaximander. By the same token, Empedocles receives considerable attention in McEvelley’s (2002: 67 *f.*, 106 *f.*, 304 *f.*) comparative studies of Greek and Indian philosophy. In the light of such recent sympathy for a long-range approach to Empedocles’ four-element doctrine, the dismissive attitude of early-20<sup>th</sup> century editor of Empedocles’ *Fragments*, W.E. Leonard:

'In Chinese philosophy the elements are supposed to conquer one another according to a definite law. We are told that wood conquers earth, earth conquers water, water conquers fire, fire conquers metal, and metal conquers wood.<sup>211</sup> But there is nothing in E[mpedocles]'s thought that seems to correspond.' (Leonard 1908: 72)

now seems to have little meaning beyond being characteristic of classics scholars' time-honoured reluctance to admit to any foreign influence upon their cherished domain – an attitude that largely triggered the *Black Athena* debate.

It is in East Asia that the most conspicuous and elaborate forms of the transformative element cycle have been attested, but that does not necessarily mean that element systems *originated* there. Going back to at least the first millennium BCE, and surfacing in various parts of the Old World and of the New World, element systems could have originated anywhere.

KING WǎN'S TRIGRAMS.

1 ☱	2 ☰	3 ☷	4 ☵	5 ☲	6 ☱	7 ☷	8 ☰
lî	sun	kǎn	kǎn	khân	k'kien	tui	khwân
Second daughter.	Oldest daughter.	Oldest son.	Youngest son.	Second son.	Father.	Youngest daughter.	Mother.
S.	S.E.	E.	N.E.	N.	N.W.	W.	S.W.

Note that my long-range linguistic analysis here is based on a particular, widely accepted but not unanimous reading of the *Yi Jing*. Legge (1882) offers the trigrams according to King Wǎn, where Earth appears as *khwân*, with might have led to a rather different etymological analysis.

Table 7.1. King Wǎn's trigrams.

I will now present a linguistic attempt to identify the Taoist system's origin more closely, starting with *Yi Jing*, and tracing the etymological antecedents of the names of its trigrams to their language's and language phyla's \*proto-forms (*i.e.* proposed earliest \*forms, systematically reconstructed by reference to accepted sound laws and explicit correspondence tables), if possible all the way back to \*Borean. The data are presented in Table 7.2:

<sup>211</sup> Original reference to Carus 1898 / 1902: 47.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Trigram Figure</b>	☰ (☰)	☱ (☱)	☲ (☲)	☳ (☳)	☴ (☴)	☵ (☵)	☶ (☶)	☷ (☷)
<b>Binary Value</b>	111	110	101	100	011	010	001	000
<b>Translation: Wilhelm, others</b>	the Creative, Force	the Joyous, Open	the Clinging, Radiance	the Arousing, Shake	the Gentle, Ground	the Abyssmal, Gorge	Keeping Still, Bound	the Receptive, Field
<b>Image in Nature</b>	heaven, aether (天)	swamp, marsh (澤)	fire (火)	thunder (雷)	wind (風), wood (木)	water (水)	mountain (山)	earth (地)
<b>Name</b>	qián	qián	lí	zhèn	xùn	kān	gèn	kūn
<b>Karlgren code</b>	0140 c	0324 a-c	0023 f	0455 s	0433 a	0624 d	0416 a	
<b>Preclassic Old Chinese</b>	ghar kār	ʔ(h)ǝis;	rǎj	tars		khēm?		
<b>Chinese meaning</b>	be creative	to open a passage through, clear	be separated	to shake	to concede; com-pliant, soft, modest	pit; bury in a pit; be sounding kan-kan	refractory, obstinate, resist	
<b>comments on Chinese</b>	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)		(e)		
<b>proto-Sino-Tibetan:</b>	*kār, 'dry' (f)		*rǎl, divide, be separated (g)	*fǝj ( ~ d-), 'shake, shiver' (h)		*krēmH		
<b>Borean</b>	KVRV, 'dry'			TVRV, 'to shake'				
<b>Eurasianic</b>	*kVwV(rV), notably: Altaic: *kǝbarV ( ~ ǝu-); Uralic: *kujwa Khanty (Ostyak): kǝjem-			*dVrV, 'to tremble', notably Indo-European: *dhreugh- (...) Altaic: *duru ( ~ -f-) Uralic: *tarV-, *tarkV				



7.6.2. Notes to Table 7.2.<sup>212</sup>

a) Starostin & Starostin (1998-2008) remark on this point: ‘perhaps: be [ *sic* ] associated with the forces of Heaven’. Old Chinese \*ghar is also used as the name for the 1st hexagram in Yijing [ *sic* ] (‘Heaven’). Middle Chinese gen is not quite regular in this series (one would rather expect Middle Chinese gən). For \*gh- cf. Xiamen khien<sup>2</sup>, Chaozhou khien<sup>2</sup>, Fuzhou khien<sup>2</sup>. Another frequent (and archaic) reading of the character is Old Chinese \*kār, Middle Chinese ka<sup>n</sup> Fan Qie 古寒), Mandarin gān ‘to be dry’ – whence, possibly, Vietnamese cān ‘dry, shallow; on land, on shore’ (although the tone is rather strange and a chance coincidence is not excluded); khan ‘hoarse, husky, raucous; anhydrous’. Note that regular Sino-Vietnamese for Middle Chinese kân is cān.’ Here and below I have expanded the original’s acronyms: OC becoming Old Chinese, etc.

b) Also read \*λ(h)ōts (Middle Chinese thwa<sup>ʎ</sup>, Peking tui) id.; \*L(h)ōts ‘glad’ (Later Zhou).

c) Also used for homonymous words: \*raj ‘to fasten in a net, get tangled, caught in a net’ (obviously related to 羅 \*rāj ‘bird-net’, 籬 \*raj ‘hedge’; sometimes written with another character, 罹 – which, however, has also a metaphoric meaning ‘trouble, anxiety, sorrow’ < ‘drag into, involve’); \*raj ‘be hanging down’; in the *die-sheng* 流離 \*ru-raj ‘horned owl’. For Old Chinese \*r cf. Min forms: Xiamen, Chaozhou li<sup>2</sup>, Fuzhou lie<sup>2</sup>. There also exists a *qu-sheng* reading \*raj-s, Middle Chinese lè (Fan Qie 力智) ‘to separate’. Regular Sino-Vietnamese is ly. Vietnamese also has rò’i ‘be separated, separate’ - probably a more archaic loan from the same source.

d) Sagart 1999: 51 (Chin.-AN).

e) Chinese: 坎 \*khēm?, 垠 \*khēm? ‘pit’. Tibetan: gjam ‘a shelter, a grotto’. Lushai: kōm ‘a hollow in the ground’, kuam ‘a valley, a hollow, a depression’. Comments: Possibly two roots, but hard to distinguish from each other.<sup>213</sup>

f) Chinese: 乾 \*kār ‘dry’ (cf. also 旱 \*ghān? ‘drought, dry’).

Burmese: kanh’ to dry up’, khañh ‘to be dried up, exhausted as liquid’.

Kachin: ka<sup>2</sup> ‘be dried up’ (?).

Comments: Matissoff 2003: 180; Luce 1981: 52. Loss of final consonant in Jinpho is not clear (Matissoff cites the form as kan<sup>2</sup>, which is probably Jinpho kan<sup>2</sup> coagulated, see \*kân). Cf. also Gurung \*khar, Kaiké khar-pa, Rourou ka.44, Bugun gau ‘dry’.

g) Burmese: hrajh to make an opening through a crowd by dispersing and scattering on both sides; to part forever

Kachin: gəran<sup>3</sup> to divide, distribute, (H) məran, pəran to separate, ran be apart, separated.

Lushai: rel? to escape, steal with away (cf. also rāl from a distance, rol go into seclu-

<sup>212</sup> Sources for both Table 7.2 and Section 7.6.2’s ‘Notes to that Table’: Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, ‘Long-range etymologies’, ‘Sino-Tibetan etymologies’, and ‘Chinese characters’. These Notes render Starostin & Starostin’s © text *verbatim*, with thanks.

<sup>213</sup> Could the enigmatic ‘pit’ semantics of one of the Nkoya clan names, be connected with this?



sion into jungle).

h) Chinese: 震 \*tərs shake; fear; clap of thunder. Tibetan: ādar to tremble, shiver, quake. Burmese: tun to tremble, shake, shiver, fear. Lepcha: tir, tjir, t̄jār to move, to shake, to curl, as in contempt; to shake, as earth, house.

i) North Caucasian: \*gfwāndV (~ -ē-, -ī-). Sino-Tibetan: \*kh\*əmH. Yenisiseian: \*kəʔd-(g-, -ǝ-, -z-). Comments and references: Cf. \*gwVŋtV. For Sino-Tibetan cf. rather Burushaski qam / qom 'hole, cave, grave'.

j) proto-Austric: \*tVr 'shake'; proto-Austroasiatic: \*tVr 'tremble'; proto-Austronesian: \*eter, \*terter 'shake, vibrate, tremble'. References: Peiros 1989.

### 7.6.3. Discussion

With state-of-the-art long-range linguistics, we now have the tools available to check Bernal's suggestion, and it proves most valuable. According to the authoritative *Tower of Babel* etymological database,<sup>214</sup> the eight trigram names with the exception of 乾 qián ('the creative, heaven') and 震 zhèn ('the arousing, thunder') have no etymologies beyond the Sino-Tibetan realm, and as many as four (notably: 兌 duì 'the joyous, swamp', 巽 xùn 'the gentle, wind, wood', 艮 gèn 'keeping still, mountain' and 坤 kūn, 'the receptive, field') even seem to lack a proto-Sino-Tibetan etymology. On the other hand, Greek ἡθῶν is generally accepted to derive (cf. Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 662 f.; Buck 1949: 16) from proto-Indo-European: \*dg'hem-, 'earth'. Of the many reflexes of this etymon in Indo-European languages only Hittite: tekan, taknas 'earth', dagan, tagan- 'down, on the ground' (Friedrich 1932: 204, 220), and Greek ἡθῶν-come anywhere near Chinese kūn, whereas the geographically best qualified languages, Tocharian A and B, remain at a greater distance with A tkam and B kem (Adams 1999: 192; note the n / m problem).

## 7.7. Transcontinental relationships and periodisation: China and West Asia

The outcome of our etymological detective work lends credibility to Bernal's suggestion and hence to Terrien's thesis, but also creates further puzzles.

If kūn, and perhaps some of the other trigram names, constitute Anatolian

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<sup>214</sup> With Sino-Tibetan etymology, and treatment of Chinese characters, compiled by the late lamented Sergei Starostin; cf. Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008.

words, was it because the trigrams originated in West Asia and from there diffused to East Asia; or was proto-Hittite's original home much more to the East? I have drawn attention to the fact that, before Hrozný's decipherment of Hittite established the Indo-European nature<sup>215</sup> of that language, its speakers were commonly regarded as 'Turanic', and even as downright Chinese. Movement back and forth across the Asian Steppe along an East-West axis has a very long history, and intensified even greatly after the invention of horse-riding and the chariot. Both the Tocharian language and the recently found Tarim mummies (Mallory & Mair 2000) suggest that exchanges (both linguistic, and cultural) between Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan may have taken place far East on the Steppe (*cf.* Tsung-tung Chang 1988). On the other hand, the linguist Karst (1931a) suggested – albeit, as we have seen, on the erroneous basis of far too modern Chinese language forms – that the realm of Sino-Tibetan may have extended into West Asia in the Bronze Age – thus foreshadowing recent, more systematic explorations into the continuities between Basque, Caucasian languages, Sino-Tibetan, and Na-Denē by such long-range linguists as Starostin, Fleming, Bengtson, etc. As a result, present-day scholarship no longer limits the Bronze-Age western extension of the Sino-Caucasian macrophylum to the Caucasus area (although as a part of West Asia this would already suit our argument), but would also include the Northwestern Iberian peninsula, part of the Northern shore of the Mediterranean, possibly also Sardinia.<sup>216</sup> In addition to exchanges in a

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<sup>215</sup> The affinity and interpenetration of the Sino-Tibetan and the Indo-European language phyla has constituted a persistent theme in scholarship. The immense Steppe environment in combination with horse-riding and chariot technology and the migratory patterns of extensive animal husbandry created favourable conditions for language contact. The above exercise concerning the probable origin of the Chinese word *kün* has several more authoritative counterparts, *e.g.* Pulleyblank 1966; Ulving 1968-1969; Tsung-tung Chang, 1988; Blažek 2010a. In addition to horizontal borrowing, there is a strong argument for a genetic relationship. Under Fleming's and Starostin's \*Borean Hypothesis, the macrophyla to which the Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European phyla respectively belong, Sino-Caucasian and Eurasiatic, are both branches of the \*Borean trunk, and as I will indicate below (Fig. 8.2) there are strong statistical indications that their separation only took place in the Uppermost Palaeolithic (van Binsbergen, in press (b); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 77 *f.*) so that even when allowing for phonological and semantic drift we would still expect a fair degree of lexical overlap – as in fact has been found.

<sup>216</sup> McCall & Fleming 1999; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: *passim*, see that book's Index of Proper Names.

contact area where the two language groups and their distinctive cultures more or less share a habitat, we may reckon with the simple displacement of people, linguistic elements, and ideas across the great distances of the Steppe. Needham with Ling's path-breaking study (1961 / 1954) gives a long list of East-West technological and intellectual exchanges. In the preceding decades there was a tendency<sup>217</sup> to see astronomical and astrological knowledge as travelling *West-East* in (proto-) historical times, *i.e.* from West Asia to China, by long-range spatial transfer. Let us review this case briefly.

Already the 17<sup>th</sup>-century scholar Athanasius Kircher, enlightened by the flow towards Europe of valid Sinological knowledge from Jesuit missionaries, but despite all his efforts unable yet to read Ancient Egyptian texts, claimed that the Chinese civilisation was largely dependent on Egypt. Under the then prevailing Jesuit Figurism, his older contemporary Bouvet equated the Chinese mythical emperor and culture hero Fu Xi with such heroes of the Western (including Islamic) esoteric tradition as Hermes Trismegistus, Zoroaster, Enoch and Noah (Walker 1972; Leibniz 1994: 98). The idea however was more than just a vindication of Christianity in disguise, for a long-range look at some of these culture heroes reveals that they have much in common (*e.g.* as White Gods of creation or Second Creation) and are likely to have an antiquity that goes back to the proto-Neolithic if not further back.<sup>218</sup> Terrien de Lacouperie's (1882, 1892a, 1892b) claim, now partly vindicated in this Chapter, of a Mesopotamian origin for *Yi Jing* was contested by Legge 1891 / 1988: xix; but Warrington Eastlake (1880) made a similar claim. We have already seen how Carus claimed a close parallel between between the '*Urim and Thummim* oracle of Ancient Israel, and '*Lo Pan*' (*luó pán*) divination of Ancient China. Many scholars around 1900 entertained similar ideas,<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Partly based on now obsolete paradigms (including pan-Babylonism), but partly also inspired by a long-range awareness which (initially based on Western Assyriological and Sinological knowledge that was far below today's standards) was to become increasingly counter-paradigmatic in the course of the 20th century CE.

<sup>218</sup> van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Ch. 5, especially pp. 136 *f.*

<sup>219</sup> Kugler 1900: 79f; Bezold 1919 (surprisingly sophisticated and apparently little dated); Ungnad 1932-; Carus (1911; 1902, 1907; also *cf.* Ball 1891, for which see Anonymous 1909). Not every scholar joined this choir, *e.g.* Eberhard (1949) rejected (probably unjustifiably so) Dubs' (1946) theory of Zoroastrian influence on Taoism –

and extended them to the Mesopotamian (Sumerian, Akkadian) forms of divination that make up a considerable part of the Assyriological corpus and that had been closely studied by 1900. Much later the same opinion was, more systematically, expressed by the great Assyriologist Oppenheim 1966: 37):

‘Divination is applied in Mesopotamia on two distinct levels – the popular or folklore level and that of elaborate scholarly amplification and specialization. *Both constitute a trans-Asiatic culture trait.* Evidence for this is available from the Mesopotamian region across Asia to China, with Japan in the East and Etruria in the West as outposts. In Egypt, divination remains conspicuously absent up to the last dynasties, when a good deal of “Asianization” took place. There is a wide range in the media and the techniques of divination, conditioned by time and region. These variations only underline the deep-seated and lasting need for this type of communion with the supernatural, whatever specific methods of observation and interpretation are applied. (...) Wherever in Asia either the observations or the predictions related to divination have been preserved in writing, or where – this optimum happened only in Mesopotamia – both aspects of this science are available to us, we are given the opportunity to look deep into such a civilization. From the oracle bones of Anyang in northern China and the earliest liver models found in Mari to the elaborate horoscope of yesterday’s India, we have an overwhelming abundance of information well able to take us on a grand tour through space and time, exploring much of the intellectual history of Asia. Like currents which move across the entire immense continent, central Asiatic divination practices reach the Euphrates (extispicy) and become there the object of scholarly endeavors from the early second millennium B.C. onward, and Mesopotamian astrology and other divination methods penetrate eastward through India, Tibet, and into China during the first half of the first millennium A.D. To trace these lines of contact will be the task of several generations of scholars from many disciplines.’ (Oppenheim 1966: 37; italics added)

A study in its own right could be written on the correspondences, and perhaps historical continuities, between Sumerian me 𒀭𒄀, Greek *logos* λόγος, and Chinese 道 *Tao* – to say nothing of Ancient Egyptian *ma-at* 𓄏 – all of which convey the sense of cosmic, societal and personal order.

We have already seen, in passing, how in addition to astrology and other divinatory ancient sciences, also mythological iconography could have played a role in bringing out East-West continuities across Eurasia. Now, primal gods and culture heroes with snake-like legs are to be found in the West, in Ancient Greece as, presumably, a Pelasgian heritage (once more,

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also cf. Schmidt 1933 and my above cursory notes on Manichaeism (p. 224n).

Cecrops and Erichthonius, associated with pre-Hellenic Athens), and in China as Fu Xi and Nü Wa; and how Temple (1976) sees the connection between these extremes, in space and time, in the Sumerian mythical figure Oannes, likewise alleged to combine an aquatic nature with the status of culture hero. Also the Ancient Mesopotamian water god Ea / Enki has the same serpentine features.

The debate on Chinese-West Asian continuities has been waged since the times of G. Schlegel (second half 19th c. CE), and has acquired Afrocentrist overtones in recent decades with the work of Clyde Winters, to whom we already referred in an earlier Chapter.<sup>220</sup> Archaeologically, the continuity between West Asia and China in Neolithic times in terms of ceramics, food production (agricultural implements, names of domestic animals) and weaponry was found to be remarkable, perhaps with an overall tendency towards West-East movement. Scholars who took Terrien de Lacouperie's theory seriously, tended to interpret the expression 百姓 'Bak Sing' / 'Hundred Families' as referring to immigrants into Chinese lands specifically from Central Asia (Sogdiana, Bactria etc.), where Hellenistic and Mesopotamian influence was considerable. In recent work reflecting today's scholarly standards, these viewpoints have largely been discarded, yet similar ideas have replaced them and for very good reasons, e.g. in Witzel 2009 (where, with a focus on Japan, he lists the many trans-Steppe Eurasian mythological continuities); and in Mori Masako (1995, 2009), where the specific claim is made that the mythical archer 后羿 Hou Yi – one of the most popular figures of Chinese mythology – goes back to a Mesopotamian prototype and is cognate to Graeco-Roman Heracles / Hercules.

The uncontested expression 'black(-headed) people' reminds us of the fact that a postulated prehistoric Black presence in Eurasia constitutes a cherished Afrocentrist theme (Van Sertima 1985, which collection contains one of Martin Bernal's first statements on his *Black Athena* thesis): from the extreme West of Eurasia (the so-called Black Irish of popular ethnic classification, and of myth) to South Asia (the highly pigmented Dallit, once designated 'Untouchables', who have been claimed to be continuous with the population of sub-Saharan Africa; Winters (1988)

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<sup>220</sup> Cf. Winters 1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1983a, 1983b, 1985, 1988a, 1988b.

also throws in the Tamil ethnico-linguistic cluster); to even East Asia, where Winters (1983, and many recent discussions on the Internet) claims that the 夏朝 Xia and 商朝 Shang dynasties were founded by Black Africans. In my own research of transcontinental connections I have repeatedly stumbled upon ‘uninvited guests’, *i.e.* linguistic and cultural varieties that appeared to be ‘out of place’ from the perspective of prevailing theoretical and geopolitical paradigms. Thus I found indications of a \*proto-Bantu-speaking presence in the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean, as one of the linguistico-ethnic components of what stood out as the Pelasgian complex. This, in combination with

- archaeological and ethnographic evidence of now mainly African traits in West Asia (elongated labia, round house plan, spiked wheel trap, mankala games, the belief in a unilateral mythical being, etc.) and of
- my claim of a substantial \*Borean and temperate-zone background for the Niger-Congo phylum of which Bantu is a major branch<sup>221</sup>
- and indications<sup>222</sup> of an early association between Bantu-speakers and metallurgy (even though these cannot be claimed to have been the very earliest metalworkers; Alpern 2005)

brought me to propose (with now discarded predecessors such as Trombetti) a rather different early history of the Bantu sub-phylum: from West, South, South East or East Asia, into Africa, where despite specialists’ claims of an origin c. 8 ka BP near Lake Chad, true Bantu expansion is only considered to date from the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> mill. BCE – as can be very well accommodated within my proposal. These counter-paradigmatic linguistic and cultural considerations are well compatible with the Afrocentrist idea of a highly pigmented population segment preceding the spread of lowly pigmented populations in Eurasia.

Theoretically it is conceivable that both Chinese kūn and the superficially similar Greek and Hittite forms derive not from one another but from a common ancestral form, which then (between Indo-European < Eurasianic / Nostratic, and Sino-Tibetan < Sino-Caucasian), could only be situated at

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<sup>221</sup> van Binsbergen 2011d, and in press (b).

<sup>222</sup> van Binsbergen in press (b).

the \*Borean level. This however turns out not to be the case: there is undoubtedly a genetic relationship, but it cannot have produced kūn in the Sino-Tibetan context, since in the latter macrophylum, the \*Borean root in question, \*TVKV (*cf.* Table 6.2) did not produce the reflex kūn but instead \*proto-Sino-Caucasian \*dVKwV.<sup>223</sup>

The etymology of the Indo-European words in question is not controversial. Via proto-Indo-European \*dg'hem- or \*dh'ghem-, 'earth' they derive from Eurasianic: \*DVG-, 'earth', which has also yielded proto-Altaic: \*t'āgo [+ Tungus-Manchu \*tuka(la)?] 'dirt, dust, clay'; no reflexes in Japanese); Kartvelian: \*diq-, 'clay, earth'; Dravidian: \*TūK-, 'earth'; and Eskimo-Aleut: \*taɣŋə- (-ŋɣ-) ? 'black' (*cf.* Illich-Svitych 1965 / 1967: 342, 1971-1981: I, 220; Dolgopolsky n.d.: 551, 2331, 2347). Ultimately, Eurasianic \*DVG- may be claimed to derive from \*Borean (approx.): \*TVKV,<sup>224</sup> 'earth', which appears in other linguistic (macro-)families as follows. *proto-Afroasiatic*: daḳw-, 'clay'; *proto-Sino-Caucasian* \*[t]VQV, whence – Starostin 1989 – proto-Sino-Tibetan: \*dhək, 'clay, mire' (with Chinese: 埴 \*dhək, \*thəks, 'clay, clayey' – *not even remotely reminiscent of* 坤 kūn, proto-Tibetan: ādag, 'clay; cleaving, adhering', proto-Lushai: diak, 'mud, mire'), proto-Yeniseian: \*təq-, proto-Burushaski: \*toq; *Austric*: proto Austronesian \*bitak, \*-tak, \*litek, 'mud; earth, ground'?, proto-Austroasiatic \*tVk, 'sticky'; *Amerind* (misc.): \*tVk-, 'dirt'; *African* (misc.): Bantu \*-tākà, 'soil'; *cf.* (Illich-Svitych 1965 / 1967: 342; Bengtson & Ruhlen 1994: 42).

It would constitute a future project in comparative historical linguistics in its own right to ascertain whether the remaining three apparently exotic trigram names, duì, xùn, and gèn, could likewise be argued to have an Anatolian / Greek background. Meanwhile, we may now safely assume that at least one of the eight trigram names, kūn, has an Anatolian / Greek language origin, which also allows us to date that name to 2nd-3rd mil-

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<sup>223</sup> Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008: 'Long-range etymologies'.

<sup>224</sup> *Cf.* Table 6.2, above, which largely deals with the reflexes of \*Borean \*TVHV, with similar semantics.

lennium BCE. Remarkably, the traditional Chinese account of the origin of the trigrams has been that the legendary ruler / culture hero Fu Xi, mythically dated to the early 3rd millennium BCE, first perceived the eight trigrams on the back of a mythical animal (dragon-horse<sup>225</sup> or turtle) emerging from the River Luò 洛河, with which also the invention of the 洛書 *luò shū* magic square is connected. Conventionally depicted (e.g. by the Song-dynasty painter 馬麟 Ma Lin; early 13<sup>th</sup> c. CE) as wearing a leopard skin and / or deer skin, the character of Fu Xi not only has shamanic and Steppe connotations but is especially continuous with iconographic patterns attested in Neolithic Anatolia,<sup>226</sup> classical Greece,<sup>227</sup> and,

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<sup>225</sup> Another well-known Chinese myth (from the 書經 *Shūjīng Classic of History*) also shows evidence of a transformation cycle of elements: 鯀 Kun / Gun, in the shape of a white horse tries to control the Primal Waters, but he is killed by the Fire-god; in Kun / Gun grows his son 大禹 [Da] Yu, a dragon who does succeed in taming the waters – with the help of Nü Wa, who only appears in the literature fairly late (350 BCE). So we have the rather familiar schema:

X [ White Horse ] seeks to control Water

Fire kills X

X produces Y [ Earth ? ]

Y control Water, with Nü Wa (Air?) as catalyst.

As a Flood heroine (which, of course, means that Nü Wa cannot be Water since she is threatened by Water), Nü Wa is particularly associated with Air – it is she (also under the name of Nü *Kwa*) who mends the holes in the Sky and thus stops the Flood (Werner 1984 / 1922: 225; Vitaliano 1973: 163). Incidentally, note the parallels with the West Eurasian ‘birth of Athena’ mytheme as discussed around Fig. 5.1. In the footsteps of Karst 1931a, I have proposed (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 105n; van Binsbergen 2011a: 334 *f.*) a Central to West Asian origin for Athena, as well as for Poseidon / Fu Xi with whom she seems to form a post-Flood sibling / twin pair (proposing a \*Borean etymology for the latter name that suggests both its extreme antiquity, and its original semantics in terms of ‘womb, female genital’ – a transformation of the Mother of the Waters). In corroboration, Athena is considered (Suidas) inventor of the chariot, which we know was invented in Kazakhstan, 2000 BCE. Her birth at Laco Tritonis in Ancient Libya, often identified with the salt lake Šoṭṭ al-Jerid (South Tunisia), would then be a common toponymical East-West displacement, supported (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Chapter 2) by the wide East and West distribution of the name Libya in the Ancient world. Similarly, the transformation cycle of elements is implied in the common stories of the Chinese god of Fire locked up in a cage but upon his release causing a Flood – as brought out in a Yao / North Vietnamese Flood myth (Dang Nghiem Van 1993: 326 *f.*; Isaak 2006).

<sup>226</sup> Cf. the famous site of Çatal Hüyük; Mellaart 1967; Kammerzell 1994.

<sup>227</sup> Besides the heroes Jason, Menelaus and Diomedes, the god Dionysus was especially connected with the leopard skin; Dionysus was mythically associated with long-



probably not unrelated (Vandenbroeck 2000), in the Neolithic Sahara, where likewise leopard skin clothing has been depicted (Breuil *et al.* 1954), and where an apparent proto-script largely built of horizontal lines and dots has been attested, *i.e.* reminiscent of geomantic notation (Lhote 1954). The Anatolian / Black Sea region to which we take recourse here, has long been recognised as exceptionally innovative, among the earliest regions of Neolithic domestication of crops and animals and of metallurgy, and arguably the homeland of at least one major language family (Indo-European), at the same time skirting the Sino-Caucasian and the Afroasiatic distribution areas, and recognised as a major region for the innovation and subsequent diffusion of mythical materials *e.g.* Flood myths.<sup>228</sup>

We have now found serious indications that it was also in the Anatolia / Black Sea region, in Neolithic times, that the very ancient heritage of a 2<sup>n</sup> based counting, classification and divinatory system came to be greatly developed and formalised into a *protoform of the transformative element cycle*. The latter subsequently found its way to China to produce the Taoist element cycle and *Yi Jing*; much later it came to Mesopotamia in °Abbāṣīd times (late 1<sup>st</sup> mill. CE) and (most probably under further Chinese feedback) became °*ilm al-raml*. It also came to North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa: certainly after 1,000 CE as a form of diffusion of the then recently formulated °*ilm al-raml*, but possibly (and this would accommodate Afrocentrist insistence that geomancy is not a recent import but is genuinely at home in Africa) already several millennia earlier; after all, al-Zanāfī's Berber name just might suggest that he formalised a system already in use in the Saharan environment where it is still widely attested.<sup>229</sup> Feuchtwang (1974) is one of the few authors to present, be-

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range eastward expansion, and his manifold leopard connotations seem to reappear in the military ranks and the adornment of the Chinese Emperor's chariot.

<sup>228</sup> Aksu *et al.* 2002; Haarmann 2005.

<sup>229</sup> However, like several other North African groups the Zanāta tribe is known for its extensive Jewish influence, and Zanati may simply have relied on Hebrew geomancies, such as have been in existence at least since Ibn Ezra אבן עזרא (1092/3–1167 CE) – his geomancy was found at the famous Cairo *geniza*). When the Geniza specialist Saul Shaked (*cf.* Shaked 1964; Schaefer & Shaked 1994) read Ibn Ezra's geomancy with me at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, Wassenaar, the Netherlands, 1994-1995, it turned out to be an unmistakable emulation of Arabic prototypes (*cf.* Fahd 1966; Skinner 1980; Jaulin 1966).

yond a mere philological argument, a cultural-anthropological analysis of Chinese geomantic divination, and to explore its similarities and differences vis-à-vis the African forms; he acknowledges Hébert's (1961) comparative analysis of African geomancies (for which already Steinschneider (1877) demonstrated the background in Arabian *'ilm al-raml*), but rejects (probably rightly) Hébert's reference to Greek philosophy as a possible substrate underlying the African forms, and stresses the differences between African and Chinese geomancies:

'Missing altogether from African geomancy, however, is the elaboration of time cycles and the whole dynamic flux [apparently is meant: the transformational and cyclical aspect – WvB] and change so essential to Chinese geomancy and horoscopy' (Feuchtwang 1974: 231).

Nonetheless, Feuchtwang admits (*cf.* Oppenheim 1966: 37) the continuity between Chinese and Etruscan augury – echoing the view that sees Ancient Chinese and Imperial Romans (whose elite women wore Chinese silk) as each other's mirror image. But when we realise that the Pelasgian socio-political system of confederations consisting of twelve named groups has a Eurasian distribution from Tyrrhenia / Etruria / Tuscany, Ancient Greece, Syro-Palestine and North Africa, possibly also Niger-Congo speaking Africa, and all the way to China,<sup>230</sup> we are tempted (and Feuchtwang admits as much, 1974: 224 *f.*) to view also the transformation cycle of elements as *Pelasgian*, to attribute a Bronze Age West Asian origin to it, and to regard the formal similarities as indications of underlying genuine cultural continuities.

In the field of global cultural history, recent decades<sup>231</sup> have made us strongly aware of the potentially Eurocentric and hegemonic implications of hypotheses claiming a European / West Asian origin for such major cultural achievements as *e.g.* Neolithic food production (now modified by the claims of African and Chinese contributions to the Neolithic revolution). Having participated in this debate, I am rather loath to conclude, for the Chinese versions of the transformative element system, a West Asian, Indo-European-speaking, origin. Yet there is so much converging corroborative evidence from adjacent knowledge fields such as astrology and

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<sup>230</sup> von Vacano 1955: 46; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 392, 112n, and references there.

<sup>231</sup> Bernal 1987-2006; Needham with Ling, 1956, 1961, vols I and II; Diop 1991.

the zodiac that such an apparently Eurocentric conclusion yet appears inevitable. Already a century ago, the great specialist on the history of astronomy and astrology Boll (1912) gave many reasons why the Chinese twelve-animal zodiac (found all over Central and Eastern Asia from Turkestan to Japan) must be considered to have an origin in Hellenist Egypt – incidentally, an intellectual milieu where, by Hellenistic times, Empedocles' four-element system had undoubtedly been accepted as central cosmology. Necessary transformations of details occurred in the process sketched by Boll: the Egyptian 'ibis' became the Chinese 'fowl', the 'crocodile' became the 'dragon'. Also the prominent Sinologist Chavannes (e.g. 1906) claimed that the twelve-animal-zodiac (applicable to periods of 12 years, days, and hours) travelled from West Asia to China via Turkestan, with the Greek-Hellenist kingdom of Bactria as the obvious bridge. A similar continuity was claimed by Leopold de Saussure (1923).<sup>232</sup> Elliot Smith (1919: 49), once the epitome of British diffusionism and knighted for his great achievements in (brain) anatomy, but (somewhat like myself) little more than an amateur in global cultural history (*cf.* Davies n.d. / 1976), makes the claim in his characteristic sweeping manner:

'In my last Rylands Lecture I referred to the probability that the essential elements of Chinese civilization were derived from the West. I had hoped that, before the present statement went to the printer, I would have found time to set forth in detail the evidence in substantiation of the reality of that diffusion of culture. Briefly the chain of proof is composed of the following links : (a) the intimate cultural contact between Egypt, Southern Arabia, Sumer, and Elam from a period at least as early as the First Egyptian Dynasty; (b) the diffusion of Sumerian and Elamite culture in very early times at least as far north as Russian Turkestan and as far east as Baluchistan; (c) at some later period the quest of gold, copper, turquoise, and jade led the Babylonians (and their neighbours) as far north as the Altai and as far east as Khotan and the Tarim Valley, where their pathways were blazed with the distinctive methods of cultivation and irrigation; (d) at some subsequent period there was an easterly diffusion of culture from Turkestan into the Shensi Province of China proper; and (e) at least as early as the seventh century B.C. there was also a spread of Western culture to China by sea.'

According to Giles (1898: 811) the theory of the interaction of the five

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<sup>232</sup> Such spread need not have depended on state agencies; itinerant diviners and magicians may have been in part responsible for it (Needham with Ling 1961; Burkert 1983).

elements is attributed to 王伋 Wang Chi, who lived during the Sung dynasty (960-1279 CE). This is about one and a half millennium after Empedocles, and might conceivably, though indirectly, have been influenced by the latter. However, another author on the Five Elements mentioned by Giles (1898: 773) was 騶衍 Tsou Yen, of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE – one century after Empedocles (c. 490-430 BCE), so possibly still independent from the latter.

Let us grant that important ingredients towards *Yi Jing* probably came from West Asia / Northeast Africa. But could we take one further step and postulate that these ingredients travelled East *after* the Presocratics had given them a decisive shape – not of a transformative cycle of element, but of four parallel, immutable ontological element states? We have here in essence the same postulated West-East transmission that is at the heart of Terrien de Lacouperie's hypothesis concerning the West Asian origin of *Yi Jing*. Could we postulate that the East Asian correlative systems have been derived, after all, from the Presocratics, via the intermediary of Hellenism specifically Hellenist Egypt?

Certainly not. In the first place, the central features of the East Asian correlative systems are cyclicity and transformation, and these are far from central among the Presocratics. It is not credible that cyclical transformation which was already a declining feature when attested in Presocratic thought, but attested for instance in Ancient Egypt, was picked up *under Presocratic influence*, and thus brought to fruition in East Asia. In the second place, our linguistic detective work suggests that the East Asian correlative systems did owe a considerable debt to West Asia, but their nomenclature betrays a proto-Hittite lexical form that must be at least a thousand years older than the Presocratics, who preceded Hellenism by several centuries again. On the basis of the flimsy evidence available, the best fitting model would be one according to which the transformation cycle of elements was invented in West Asia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, was from there transmitted to East Asia, but also lingered on locally (for instance in the Indo-Iranian fire cult, whose oldest attestations go back to the same period; or in the Lycian cult of the Fire-and-metallurgy god Hephaestus), and in good time inspired the Ionian philosophers and their followers in Graecia Magna, in the middle of the

first millennium CE – but only to lead them to formulate an element system that considerably played down the cyclic and transformational format then already around for a thousand years or longer; in fact, played down so effectively that it was soon lost in the European reception of the Presocratics in Late Antiquity and after.

One of my methodological principles has been that, if long-range transcontinental connections are to be taken seriously, this implies that conditions at one end of a chain of transcontinental connections may also apply at the other end, even if this means at thousands of kilometres and thousands of years distance. In the Skagit Native American's version of a North American element system, knowledge of the system was stressed to be *secret*. This suggests that the element system is originally esoteric, secret knowledge, to be transmitted in initiation cults such as bestow on new, young members of society the local worldview and mythology, or such as are likely to have attended the early millennia of metallurgy (Eliade 1962; McNaughton 1988). The well-known imperviousness of such cults to change may be one argument for our two Working Hypotheses – the great antiquity and transcontinental spread of these systems. The secrecy element may also go some way to explain the enigma surrounding the transformation cycle of elements in the Empedoclean context: detectable in Empedocles, more or less implicitly affirmed by such great authorities as Aristotle and Plato, yet entirely ignored by their successors in the history of Western science and cosmology.

In fact, Empedocles and the other Presocratics searching for one or more *materiae primae* do certainly present something of an enigma: considered as a group it is clear that they could work on the basis of knowledge of a four-element cycle of transformations from which each took his pick until Empedocles enlisted all four elements; the additional evidence such as the Homeric struggle of Achilles (Earth) and Hephaestus (Fire) against Scamander (Water) already alluded to above, and the very frequent mythological evocations of transformations or metamorphoses (again, Ovid's delightful *Metamorphoses* is entirely devoted to them) reveals that such knowledge probably had been available in the Greek world since at least the early Iron Age. Here and in many other oral and epic expressions of the transformation cycle of elements world-wide (*cf.* the North American

Flood stories we considered above) the typical formal relationships defined within the transformational system (notably: to kill or destroy vs. to produce, give birth to, and the attenuated forms of hindrance vs. assistance) dictate the interactions between hero protagonists and explain the futility of victory and the relative nature of defeat (van Binsbergen 2010e). This is a solid foundation to build upon, for a Presocratic philosopher. And yet the dynamism of the transformative element cycle, although clearly stated, was scarcely elaborated by Empedocles, and despite Plato's and Aristotle's affirmative commentaries scarcely played a role in the Empedoclean reception in later centuries.

Meanwhile the above transcontinental analysis leaves us somewhat uneasy. Scholars like Boll and Chavannes wrote at the high-tide of European colonialism, when it was common even for scholars to underestimate the cultural initiative and achievements of peoples outside the North Atlantic European tradition. While admitting some West-East flow, half a century later Needham with Ling (1961) present a long list of more than 70 items (including the four cardinal ones: paper, printing, the compass, and gunpowder) where the flow of cultural indebtedness was unmistakably East-West. The Hellenistic time perspective evoked by Boll and Chavannes is suspiciously shallow, when we realise that ever since the invention of horse-riding and chariot technology, in Central Asia 3,000-2000 BCE, many centuries before Hellenism, the Eurasian Steppe has been an open corridor through which all sorts of cultural achievements have constantly travelled in both easterly and westerly directions.

But do we need transcontinental transmission at all to explain the vicissitudes of element systems in Eurasia? Certain prominent scholars today claim that we can do without. Based on the inspiration from neurobiology, a new, typically Post-Modern light is thrown upon these transcontinental connections by the work of Steve Farmer *et al.* (2000), in their contribution to a collection of papers (Fiskejo 2000) on correlative cosmologies with special emphasis on East Asia. For these authors, the many formal correspondences between the correlative cosmologies we have considered in Table 4.1, are not in the least indicative of actual historic borrowing. Instead, they argue that within every literate religious tradition, specialists are constantly at work to reconcile, through ever more convoluted compromises, the contradictions that arise when their own tradition encounters, or is influenced by, an adjacent tradition with, origi-

nally, a totally different formal structure and contents. These (largely hypothetical) procedures of textual reconciliation are claimed to produce converging forms of layered complexity, which might even be predicted with a purely formal algorithm – so even if the initial input of original, local systems was absolutely unrelated and disparate, the end result, after many centuries, will show very marked similarities regardless of any real exchanges of content. This view would render the hypothesis of a common origin in some proto-historical or prehistoric substrate, *superfluous* under Occam's Razor. In an illuminating critical discussion of an earlier version of the present argument, Steve Farmer added to this point of layered text traditions the related point that the claim of any cyclical transformation cosmology spanning more than a few millennia is unrealistic, and advocated a much shallower time scale. While the eminent Asianist specialists co-signing Farmer's 2000 argument are sufficient warranty to take it seriously, it is my view that these postulated mechanisms of convergence explain only a relatively small part of the similarities and convergencies we see in the written evidence, whilst due weight must be given to the pre- and protohistorical, long-range continuities. *On the basis of the comparative data presented in this book, I can see Farmer's point as far as the Upper Palaeolithic is concerned (the Working Hypothesis with which we started out in Chapter 0), but I beg to differ in relation to the Bronze Age (our Alternative Working Hypothesis).*

Whence the unique position accorded in this book to West Asia? At the crossroads of the Old World, in the centre of the Sahara-to-China Extended Fertile Crescent (the Neolithic's cradle), with high genetic and linguistic diversity, surplus production and population increase must have created favourable conditions both for technological (metallurgy, chariot), cultural (transformation, triads, Separation of Heaven and Earth), and political innovation (state formation), and for the demic-diffusion export of the latter's results, – which, under the newly arisen forms of socio-political inequality, may often have taken the form of expulsion, to the East, West and South, of somatic and linguistic outsiders, *e.g.* highly pigmented locals speaking not proto-Eurasiatic or proto-Afroasiatic but Khoisanoid and Bantoid languages) by regionally dominant groups.

We now have enough data and analyses in hand to try and assess our two Working Hypotheses.

