BLACK GOD

The Afroasiatic Roots of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim Religions

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To my mother

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Introduction

This book presents, for the first time, a comparative study of the 'Afroasiatic' traditional religions of northern Africa and Arabia. It argues that, just as there is a common Afroasiatic language-family in this region, so too there is a common family of religions, with an inner logic to be found in myths, folk-tales, rituals, customs and beliefs as far apart as Yemen and Nigeria: what is observable by anthropologists on the ground today goes back to an ancient past shared by the Bible and the pharaohs. Thus the book uses the methods of a discipline which is often misunderstood, called 'comparative mythology', to study not just myths, but also festivals, sacrifices, circumcisions, weddings, deities, spirits and indeed any aspects of religion and society that can be found to reflect a shared inheritance.

We should therefore begin with a number of questions: What is comparative mythology? What is meant by 'Afroasiatic'? Who are the various peoples that speak Afroasiatic languages? Where do they live, and how has their history affected the religions that they have practised?

Comparative Mythology

The discipline of comparative mythology tries to compare myths in related languages: since a group of languages is thought to be descended from a common ancestral language or group of dialects, in the same way, it is thought, some myths in those languages go back to a time when the people who spoke the ancestral language or dialects lived together or in some form of contact with one another. Consequently a Sanskrit myth can shed light on a Greek one, and vice versa. Comparative mythology has its roots in the

eighteenth century, when scholars first noted the similarities between the gods and languages of Greece, Scandinavia and India. The nineteenth century saw the rise of the discipline's sister-science, comparative philology, now called historical and comparative linguistics. Here researchers concentrated on the Indo-European family of tongues, which includes English, Greek, Latin and Sanskrit. In the same way, comparative mythology looked mainly at the Indo-European field: scholars were primarily concerned with ancient Greek and Roman gods and heroes, and how these could be compared with Indian and Norse deities and epic figures. Unfortunately, these specialists tried to explain everything in terms of the phenomena of nature: all myths were reduced to stories about the sun, or about fire, and so on. By the end of the nineteenth century comparative mythology was widely ridiculed for this obsessive reductionism, and fell into abeyance.

It was not until the 1920s that the discipline was revived, by the French comparatist Georges Dumézil (1898–1986). Concentrating on the Indo-European field, Dumézil set himself the task of reconstructing an ancient Indo-European ideology. He eventually argued that this ideology was centred around three 'functions': 1) religious sovereignty, with its magical and legal aspects; 2) physical force, notably that of the warrior; 3) fertility, with its agricultural and erotic aspects. This schema has been accepted by a number of scholars and rejected by others. Under Dumézil's influence, 'comparative mythology' has come to mean 'comparative Indo-European mythology', so that hardly any studies have been made of speakers of other language-families. As regards Indo-European-speakers, the discipline has produced spectacular results for students of religion, history and literature. The structure of ancient Iranian religion, with its arrangement of archangels around a supreme God, has been shown to reflect a pattern of early Indian deities, corresponding to the three 'functions'. In much the same way, these Indian gods have been found to have their counterparts in the first, legendary kings of Rome, and a lot of Rome's history has had to be rewritten, as scholars have discovered that apparently 'historical', factual narratives were mainly adaptations of Indo-European myths. However, the most exciting by-products of comparative mythology have been in the study of literature: the two great Sanskrit epics, it has been demonstrated, have

characters who are transpositions of the same Indian deities, and the plots of these epics are mirrored in the myths of Scandinavia and Greece.

Given these noteworthy achievements in Indo-European studies, it is extraordinary that so little has been done to apply the methods of comparative mythology in other parts of the world. To be sure, the most illustrious anthropologist of our time, Claude Lévi-Strauss, has tried to argue that all American Indian myths go back to an original Amerindian civilisation. However, Lévi-Strauss belonged essentially to the now outmoded fashion of 'structuralism': his main argument is that all myths can be reduced to the same mathematical formula and reflect universal structures in the human mind. The result has been an arid succession of disembodied symbols, endlessly recombined in seemingly arbitrary permutations which have no connection with people's real religious beliefs and practices or historical development, or indeed with the storyteller's interaction with his audience in the production of oral literature. Lévi-Strauss has in effect rejected history itself in order to study myths in the same way that many linguists study languages, as static systems of interest only as they stand at a given moment, not as the product of millennia of change. What we really need in the study of American Indian myths is what Dumézil and his followers have done in the case of Indo-European-speakers: a survey of the myths of the Amerindian language-family which follows the findings of historical linguistics. Such a survey would have to consider the myths and traditional religions of the individual branches of the Amerindian family before proceeding to comparisons and conclusions – just as Dumézil concentrated first on the Indo-Iranian and Germanic branches of Indo-European.

Similarly, we also need a series of research projects on the myths and religions of the speakers of the world's language-families, Afroasiatic, Niger-Congo, Austronesian and the rest, to complement what has been done on the Indo-European side. Each project would have to begin by looking at what linguists have achieved in dividing the language-family up into different branches. The rules of method laid down by Dumézil demand that the investigator should first of all ascertain the characteristics of the deities in the myths of each branch, and then the relations

between these deities. Only then should one go on to see whether the pattern which they form corresponds to a pattern in another branch – as, for example, the Indian triad of the god of religious sovereignty, Varuna, the war-god Indra and the god of wealth, Kubera, corresponds to the Germanic triad of the god of kings, Odin, the battle-god Thor and the god of fertility, Njord.

The Term 'Afroasiatic'

The Afroasiatic language-family is the most important in northern Africa and South-West Asia. It can be briefly described as consisting of the Semitic branch plus Egyptian, Berber, Hausa and related languages or dialects, and the Kushitic and Omotic branches in the Horn of Africa. These six branches seem to go back to a Proto-Afroasiatic language or group of dialects, spoken perhaps in the south-east of what is now the Saharan desert (but was originally a quite inhabitable region) or perhaps in the Middle East, more precisely in Palestine and Syria. The six branches are not so closely related as the various branches of the Indo-European family (e.g. Germanic and Slavonic), and thus seem to have begun to separate from one another at a very early date: not later than the eighth millennium BCE. However, this process of separation would have been a long one, with speakers of different branches splitting off from one another and migrating at different times, perhaps as late as the fifth millennium. Moreover, there have been plenty of contacts between speakers of the different branches, and these contacts seem to have reinforced cultural similarities of great antiquity, which, although probably not usually representing actual Proto-Afroasiatic elements, nonetheless reflect an inner logic and unity of an 'Afroasiatic' character.[1]

'Afroasiatic' logic is in my view primarily dualistic and based on the opposition between male and female. It is a highly practical form of logic, being directed towards the successful practice of agriculture, in which Afroasiatic-speakers seem to have been engaged from a very early date. Thus this logic is particularly directed towards obtaining water, and operates by combining a male storm-god, black and violent, with a female deity of the sun, white and vulnerable. In both myth and ritual the two are brought together when a maiden is offered up to the storm-god, thereby

ensuring a violent downpour. However, this downpour must end, so that its destructive effects also cease, and so that fertilising water may then flow peacefully through the sown fields. Here Afroasiatic logic demands that the storm-god be killed by a younger male deity, who represents the fertilising water itself and, as a spiller of blood, is naturally symbolised by the colour red. The young hero rescues the maiden who has been exposed in a sacrifice to his older rival, and duly weds her in a 'sacred marriage': one dualistic combination is replaced by another.

This 'Afroasiatic' logic appears to be thoroughly ingrained in the languages of the six branches. In contrast to the ancient Indo-European languages, which have three genders, masculine, feminine and neuter, and languages of other families, which often have no gender at all, Afroasiatic languages are characterised by an essential bipolarity of the masculine and feminine genders. Whereas in Indo-European languages the distribution of nouns between the genders is not particularly meaningful, in Afroasiatic languages it is extremely significant. Here, in general, the masculine gender expresses greatness, strength, prestige and energy, and is used, for example, to designate a large house as opposed to a small one, or economically important animals such as cattle. The feminine gender expresses smallness, weakness, lack of prestige and also passivity. Thus it is used to form diminutives, and is employed to designate small and economically unimportant animals like mice. The feminine gender is also characteristic of things which not only have a passive role in life but also result from some activity: 'share', 'clothing', 'corpse', 'offspring', 'meat'. Not surprisingly, this is thought to reflect a social reality in which women are accorded a markedly inferior status. The religious significance of this will become clear when we see, in the religions of Afroasiatic-speakers, a constant emphasis on bipolarity and in particular the male–female opposition.[2]

The Semitic Branch

It seems likely that the original speakers of the Semitic branch broke off from other Afroasiatic-speakers in the sixth or fifth millennium BCE, that is to say in the 'Neolithic' period, noted for the beginnings of agriculture and domestication of livestock.

Reconstruction of the Proto-Semitic vocabulary shows that its speakers were breeding sheep and cattle, but were not nomads. By the middle of the fourth millennium the Proto-Semitic language had split into different dialects, and the various speakers of these were certainly by this time in South-West Asia (their ancestors had perhaps been there already). These dialects were to yield new languages: Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, South Arabian languages and the various Semitic languages of Ethiopia.[3]

Now these dialects, in the fourth millennium, were concentrated in the Fertile Crescent (Iraq, Syria, Palestine) and the Arabian peninsula. Consequently their speakers were placed in geographical conditions which imposed a preoccupation with fertility and in particular the water-supply. In Iraq water has come from two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, but often in a haphazard manner, with severe floodings and devastation. Elsewhere in the region rainfall has usually been highly erratic, with violent storms both feared and prayed for as necessary. Thus religion and myth have centred around the figures of a storm-god or demon, black like his clouds, and a benevolent god of the fertilising water which flows after the initial storm or flooding.

In history this preoccupation with fertility has been reflected in repeated migrations of Semitic-speaking peoples from the Arabian peninsula, as it has kept drying up over the millennia, into the Fertile Crescent and northern Africa. During the seventh century CE there occurred the most spectacular manifestation of this tendency, with the rise of Islam and the Arab conquests in North Africa, Egypt and the Middle East. In later centuries further movements of populations were to reinforce much more ancient Semitic influences (for example, those of the Phoenicians at Carthage in what is now Tunisia) on North African soil.

Southern Arabia, and in particular Yemen, is of exceptional interest for our purposes. Here sea, desert and mountain surround unusually fertile areas with regular and abundant rainfall. In the ancient world this region had a prospering civilisation, famous for its frankincense and myrrh and reflected in the legend of the Queen of Sheba. Later, in spite of various foreign conquerors, Yemen was often in the hands of local warlords, and its indigenous customs and folklore, protected by geographical isolation, often

remained unchanged by Islam. Thus Yemeni folktales often echo ancient South Arabian inscriptions, and contemporary pilgrimage-rituals reflect pre-Islamic legends. The ancient rite of the hunt of the ibex, performed in order to guarantee the water-supply, has continued to be observed up to our own time, while marriage-customs still echo the archaic Arabian practice of integrating the groom into the bride's family. This is all-important for the comparatist. For Indo-European myths Dumézil was able to obtain invaluable materials from the folklore of the Ossetians, descendants of the ancient Scythians whose isolation in the Caucasus mountain valleys had preserved their legends' archaic structures for millennia. In the same way the brilliant Frankfurt scholar, Werner Daum, has used Yemeni folktales to reconstruct ancient Semitic mythology and religion. Our first chapter will summarise his arguments, which provide the springboard for the rest of our investigation.[4]

Thus our use of Daum's work closely parallels a lot of studies made in comparative Indo-European mythology. Dumézil often expressed his deep regret that nobody had ever applied his methods to Semitic materials: this gap seems to have been largely filled by Daum, who also noted that Semitic religion was probably related to the religions of other Afroasiatic-speakers. The present study is devoted to exploring the evidence for such a relationship. Dumézil used Ossetian folktales to reconstruct the original religion of the Indo-Iranian branch of Indo-European-speakers (to which the Ossetians belong), and then to analyse epics in various Indo-European languages. Similarly, we shall argue that Yemeni folktales are important not just for studying Semitic religion, but also for examining Egyptian, North African, Hausa and Ethiopian myths.

Egypt

It seems likely that the earliest speakers of Egyptian were the first Afroasiatic-speakers to break away from the ancestral group, sometime before 7000 BCE. They would then have migrated to Egypt. In this branch of Afroasiatic Egyptian is the only language, attested from the third millennium and known as Coptic in its latest phase, from the second century BCE to the seventeenth CE.[5] In this book it is only the myths and religion of ancient Egypt

which will be considered, as constituting a rich and much-studied field of obvious value to the comparatist, although doubtless some illuminating evidence could also be found in modern ethnography.

In approaching ancient Egypt it is essential to bear in mind the role of the Nile. Egypt has hardly any rainfall, and what little there is is damaging and useless for agriculture. Thus the ancient Egyptians were entirely dependent upon the Nile and its annual pattern of inundation. The year was divided into three seasons: the 'inundation' itself, when the land was flooded; the season of the land's emergence; and the season when water was lacking. If the flood did not materialise or came with too great force then absolute disaster ensued. On either side of the black, fertile soil watered by the Nile there stretched the red, barren desert. Accordingly, the mythological and religious colour-scheme of other Afroasiatic-speakers altered here. Whereas elsewhere black was the colour of the violent but necessary storm-god, and red the colour of the brave young warrior-god who killed him and made fertilising water flow, in Egypt black was usually a benign colour of fertility itself, and red was the colour of the generally useless and hated storm-god Seth.

This pattern of opposites, based on the Nile, dominated ancient Egypt's history and institutions. In the predynastic period, up to c.3100 BCE, there were, it appears, two kingdoms, one in Upper (or southern) Egypt, with Seth as its god, and one in Lower (or northern) Egypt, with Seth's enemy Horus as its protecting deity. Then, around 3100, these kingdoms, with their two crowns, were united; but the state which emerged was always seen as a dual one, with two regions and a marked bipolarity in administration and political and religious thought. It was also a state which was to be subject to many invasions and conquests, notably by Semitic-speakers from Asia. That poses considerable problems for the comparatist, since it is difficult to distinguish between what is Afroasiatic and authentically Egyptian on the one hand and what is Afroasiatic and the result of later Semitic influences on the other. This is particularly the case in the cult of the god Osiris, who acquires much greater importance as Egyptian history progresses and, it has been argued, is originally a deity of the Upper Egyptian royal dead and only subsequently becomes a symbol of fertilising water. This later development has been seen as inspired

by Semitic religion. The difficulties are compounded by the fact that we are often dependent upon Greek sources, thoroughly imbued with the Greek taste for antithesis and contrasting opposites – perhaps itself of Afroasiatic origin. In our conclusions we shall indeed argue that the Greeks acquired their preoccupation with bipolarity from Afroasiatic sources, whether Semitic, Egyptian or both. Thus there are enormous problems in using Greek sources to try to establish the nature of an originally Afroasiatic and truly Egyptian dualism, independent of Semitic borrowings.

North Africa

The 'Berber' branch of Afroasiatic is linguistically fairly close to the Semitic one, and seems to have separated from it in the sixth or fifth millennium BCE. It appears likely that at this time its speakers migrated to various areas in North Africa, as far as the Atlantic and the Canary Islands. 'Berber' is not quite correct as a title: a more exact one would be 'Libyan–Guanche', Guanche being the name given to a group of languages previously spoken by the inhabitants of the Canary Islands and replaced by Spanish, the language of their conquerors, from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries CE. 'Old Libyan' is found in inscriptions in Algeria and Tunisia from the second century BCE: now it has given way to 'Berber', which French scholars see as a single language, while others see it as divided into a number of different ones. 'Berber' is spoken across North Africa and to some extent in West Africa as well.[6]

North Africa is called by the Arabs 'The Island of the West', and indeed is like an island, surrounded by the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Saharan desert. Conventionally the term 'North Africa' is used to designate the area stretching to the west of Egypt, whereas 'northern Africa' includes not only this area but also Egypt itself and the rest of the northern half of the continent, including West Africa and Ethiopia. Here we shall consider evidence from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. The region has mountain chains, a long fertile plain, and the beginnings of the desert. There are also rivers, joined to the coast by wadis, the famous river-beds of the Arab world, which as elsewhere are often dry.

After the Berbers, as we shall now call the 'Libyan'-speakers, had settled in North Africa there were to be many more colonists and invaders. From around 1000 BCE the Phoenicians, a Semitic-speaking people from the eastern Mediterranean, began to colonise the North African coastline. Around 450 BCE one Phoenician colony, Carthage, acquired a powerful empire in the north of the continent. There were, however, to be indigenous revolts and native rulers before, in 146 BCE, the Romans destroyed Carthage and began to rule in what is now Tunisia. Roman rule was later extended right along the coast, and lasted until 439 CE. Vandal and Byzantine domination ensued before the Arab (and Muslim) conquest in the seventh century. In the eleventh century the Muslim rulers of Egypt decided to send tens of thousands of Bedouin from Egypt to North Africa to live there in perpetuity. From then on a huge number of Berber nomads became Arabised, adopting the Arabic language and claiming Arab ancestry. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the French conquered and ruled a lot of North Africa, establishing protectorates in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.

This troubled history has produced huge problems for our investigation. As in Egypt, it is difficult to separate what is indigenous from what is 'Semitic', whether Phoenician (or Carthaginian) or Arab. Most of the present-day inhabitants of North Africa consider themselves to be Arabs, whereas only a small proportion are really of Arab descent. The so-called 'Arab' majority lives alongside a Berber minority, which speaks Berber and in recent years has increasingly asserted its Berber identity. This identity is at the present time militantly proclaimed against 'Arab' opponents, whether hard-line Islamic activists or secular-minded socialists. However, North African 'Arabs' and Berbers often share the same customs, and this is most confusing for our purposes, as it is not easy to determine whether a given custom is really Berber or the result of Arabisation.

Moreover, further problems for our investigation are produced by the fact that our principal informants for the study of Berber religion, modern French social scientists, are just as fond of dualistic oppositions as were Egypt's classical Greek visitors: since the nineteenth century they have been preoccupied with bipolarity and seen it as a universal phenomenon. To begin with, French

sociologists thought that all 'primitive' societies possessed a dualistic form of social organisation, with all tribes being divided into two halves or 'moieties', so that everybody had to find a spouse in the opposing half. Later, Lévi-Strauss and his disciples in anthropology decided that dualistic oppositions were produced by a universal tendency of the human mind, which invariably developed pairs of opposites like 'nature and culture' or 'the raw and the cooked'. So when we examine French social scientists' work on Berber religion we have to ask ourselves whether we are really encountering genuine examples of Afroasiatic and Berber bipolarity or rather projections of modern French academic preoccupations.

The Hausa

It seems likely that, shortly after the original Egyptian-speakers broke away from the ancestral Afroasiatic grouping , no later than the eighth millennium BCE, speakers of another branch, Chadic, also broke off and moved to the south of the Sahara. Linguistically, Chadic is closest to Egyptian. There are about 150 Chadic languages or dialects, all modern, spoken in West and Central Africa. Of these by far the most important is Hausa; the rest are spoken by comparatively small ethnic groups. Here it is only Hausa-speakers who will concern us. They live mainly in northern Nigeria and southern Niger, but also in other African countries. The language has existed in written form since the sixteenth century CE. 'Hausa' is also the name of the people who are its native speakers.[7]

The principal area inhabited by the Hausa, straddling the frontier between Nigeria and Niger, is on part of the great African continental plateau. Here there is a short rainy season, lasting from May or June to September or October, and beginning with violent storms after an intensely hot period, which concludes the long dry season, the rest of the year. Not surprisingly, the indigenous religion of the Hausa has been dominated by the figure of a black storm-god, seen as uniting himself with the rainy season itself. Thus here the climatic background would appear to have reinforced an already existing Afroasiatic logic. The Hausa are agriculturalists, cultivating sorghum, maize and

millet. Rain has been all-important to them, and there has been constant fear of drought – well justified, if the experience of recent decades, when drought and famine have struck hard in the region, is anything to go by.

It is thought that the Hausa moved into this region in the tenth century CE. Islamisation began in the fourteenth century, but made slow progress, and indigenous customs continued to be observed. At the start of the nineteenth century the local Fulani people conquered the Hausa and tried to impose Islamic ideals. The British took over in northern Nigeria at the beginning of the twentieth century and ruled until 1960, while the French governed Niger in the same period. This division of colonial authority has been reflected in anthropological fieldwork, with Anglo-Saxons operating in Nigeria and French researchers in Niger. One British investigator has studied Hausa communities in North Africa, notably with reference to the famous Hausa spirit possession cult, which is of great importance for our purposes, since the spirits which are found in this cult seem to be ancient Hausa deities and reflect an Afroasiatic pattern.

The Hausa present problems similar to those encountered in the study of other Afroasiatic-speaking peoples. It is difficult to determine to what extent their religious beliefs and practices are authentically Hausa or result from external influences. Islamisation has brought a lot of confusing changes, notably as regards the Afroasiatic religious colour-scheme: white, among the Hausa, is the colour of Islam and peace. Yet more confusion has been caused by influences from inner Africa: foreign deities have been absorbed into the Hausa spirit possession cult, turned into spirits and labelled as 'black'. Moreover, it is not easy to decide the provenance of archaic marriage-customs and legends found in Nigeria and Niger. Both marriage-customs and legends give much importance to water, and one meets much the same patterns as in South Arabia and elsewhere: the bride is bathed and painted with henna in a symbolic re-enactment of the production of water and vegetation, and myths speak of the giving of a bride to a water-god. However it is not clear to what extent this may reflect Arab influence coming from the north or the presence of a branch of the Berbers, the Tuareg, long established in this region.

The Kushitic Branch and the Oromo People

The Kushitic branch of Afroasiatic, found in the Horn of Africa (an old name for part of this region, Kush, gives it its title), is thought to have split off not later than the eighth millennium BCE. Its earliest speakers would have migrated – no later than the next millennium – to East Africa. Kushitic is closest to Semitic. It includes Somali and various languages spoken in Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania. One of these, Oromo, is spoken by about 40 per cent of the Ethiopian population. Its speakers, the Oromo people, are the biggest ethnic group of the Horn. Here we shall consider them alone, since their traditional religion has been well preserved and well studied by various specialists.[8]

In southern Ethiopia, where the Oromo live, their territory consists of both highlands and lowlands. Those of them who live in both or the former grow grain-crops and coffee and breed cattle, sheep, goats and poultry; those who live just in the lowlands are pastoralists. In the highlands the main rainy season starts in June/July, and in September their begins a long dry season. At this time the harvest also begins, and in most of Ethiopia this is seen as the start of the year, celebrated with an important feast. In March a 'little' rainy season begins, with comparatively limited rainfall. However, in the southern lowlands, where an important branch of the Oromo, the Borana, live today, the main rainy season (and the year itself) starts in February/March. In May/June a 'small dry season' follows, succeeded by small rainstorms before the long dry season begins in November.

Nobody knows where and when the Oromo and their language first emerged out of the rest of the Kushitic branch. The latter had certainly been in the Ethiopian region for millennia. The Oromo made their first appearance in written history in the sixteenth century, when they moved northwards from the far south of Ethiopia (thought to be their original homeland). Some of them became Muslims, and from the eighteenth century some small Muslim Oromo states emerged. In the 1880s and 1890s these were conquered by the Christian, Semitic-speaking Amhara people who had dominated Ethiopia for centuries and now established their empire over all of it. Christianisation followed.

Subsequently there was a brief Italian occupation in the 1930s, and also a Marxist–Leninist regime from 1974 to 1991. Today the place of the Oromo population in the Ethiopian state is unclear. Part of it adheres to its traditional religion, part to Islam and part to Christianity, but even the Muslim and Christian Oromo continue to preserve their old beliefs and rituals. It must be borne in mind, however, that Christianity in Ethiopia has been of a very unusual kind: it has been characterised by an insistence on retaining the institutions of the Hebrew Bible, notably male circumcision and the observance of the Sabbath.

This distinctive Christian and Semitic background has produced problems for our investigation of a kind repeatedly noted above. When we see archaic rituals among the Oromo we have to try to distinguish the legacy of the Christian, Amhara overlords from the indigenous Oromo substratum. This is particularly the case in the Ethiopian Christian Feast of the Cross, in which the Oromo are partly observing a ritual taken from the Amhara, partly continuing their ancient tradition of singing triumph-songs in celebration of masculinity and killings. Similar problems arise when Oromo religion closely resembles Semitic religion: the emphasis on male circumcision and bloody sacrifices seems to be due to a common Afroasiatic source, but the Oromo myth of the son who steals his father's blessing at his brother's expense probably comes from the Bible.

The Omotic Branch

The Omotic branch of Afroasiatic is so called because it is found around the river Omo in south-west Ethiopia. Its first speakers would seem to have migrated towards this area no later than the seventh millennium BCE. Only modern, living languages of this branch are known. The Omotic branch is perhaps closer to Egyptian and Chadic than to the other branches.[9] Among the peoples who speak Omotic languages we may note the Kafa, whose striking monarchical tradition has inspired misleading speculation about connections with the pharaohs. The Kafa kings are of particular interest for our purposes, since they perform sacrifices of bulls beside rivers and are surrounded by archaic taboos. Another Omotic people, the Janjero, have attracted

attention for their unusual initiation rites for males (excision of nipples and extirpation of one testicle). Their religious life, like that of the Kafa, is centred around their king, who is involved in rituals which are clearly 'sacred marriages' with female partners. In the past many human sacrifices used to be made in order to strengthen the Janjero king, who was seen as a guarantor of fertility. Yet another group of Omotic-speakers, the Dorze, have been the subject of much study by anthropologists, owing to their peculiar mixture of democratic assemblies and hereditary offices. The Dorze have important ceremonies for the circumcision of males, which involve the ritual hunt of a bird, and also have distinctive marriage-customs and taboos surrounding their brides and dignitaries.

It is to be noted that in this part of Ethiopia there are also some so-called 'archaic' peoples, at a very early stage of economic and cultural development: they have sometimes been 'Omoticised' in language and (to varying degrees) culture. This poses enormous problems, since it is not easy to see to what extent these 'archaic' peoples can appropriately be discussed in comparisons of the religions of Afroasiatic-speakers. Moreover, some German anthropologists, whose other work is excellent, have studied these 'archaic' peoples in a highly perfunctory and misleading manner, which partially reflects discredited ideas of 'race' – a difficulty further discussed later in this book.

Omotic-speakers live mainly to the west of the southern Ethiopian chain of lakes in the Rift Valley. They are highland peoples with the same climate as the highland Oromo. Their economy is based on the cultivation of cereals, along with ensete or 'false banana' (a tuberous plant), and cattle-breeding. As in the rest of Ethiopia, the main festival is the Amharic Feast of the Cross. This is held in September, with huge bonfires, which evidently belong to an ancient and pre-Christian past. Omotic-speakers have also, in the past, had other annual feasts and sacrifices, usually of cattle but also of human beings.

These sacrifices, as we have noted, have been closely connected to the institution of sacral kingship characteristic of most Omotic-speaking peoples. This is an institution of great antiquity, and of great interest for Afroasiatic parallels. The king, by killing in the act of sacrifice, re-enacts the slaying of the old black god by the

young god of fertilising water. However, here again we have to confront a late Semitic overlay: the Amhara colonised this area in the late middle ages, and in the 1890s they re-imposed their authority, turning the native kings into mere subordinates. Consequently, as elsewhere, it is often difficult for us to isolate the original indigenous traditions.

Method

The method I have used in this book is essentially inspired by Dumézil: I have tried to see how a pattern identified in the myths and religion of one Afroasiatic branch can also be found in others, so that the various branches shed light on each in turn. This method is often confused with the 'structuralist' fashion of imposing an artificial grid of elements upon one's materials, or arguing for the existence of universal structures in the mind. But what Dumézil in fact did was to insist on identifying explicitly enunciated patterns in the evidence available: inscriptions, literary texts, folktales and modern eye-witness descriptions of archaic rituals. Thus Dumézil, on the Indo-European side, would look for triads in these materials which expressed the threefold pattern of religious sovereignty, force and fertility, and in particular triads of gods in, for example, ancient Near Eastern inscriptions, Indian hymns and Ossetian folktales and prayers. Dumézil also insisted that these triads be expressed clearly and unequivocally by the sources – for example in the trio of goddesses whose beauty is judged by the hero Paris in Greek literature and art. In the same way I have looked, on the Afroasiatic side, for triads reflecting the black storm-deity, the young hero who kills him and the goddess whom the hero marries: the evidence which I have surveyed is less literary than Dumézil's, since it consists more of anthropological descriptions of sacrifices to gods or spirits, along with folktales or myths collected by modern researchers, and has a smaller quantity of ancient literary materials, but the method is the same. The triads have to be identified so clearly that they cannot be dismissed as due merely to chance or the investigator's imagination.

It must be emphasised that my purpose is not to reconstruct some 'Proto-Afroasiatic' religion. That is not possible, given the early separation of the six branches, which makes the idea of

such an ancestral religion too nebulous to be contemplated, and also given the strong evidence, repeatedly noted above, of influence from the Semitic branch upon the other branches, which would suggest that the similarities are due largely to the diffusion of early Semitic, biblical, Christian, Islamic and Arab elements. I am certainly not suggesting that any Afroasiatic (or Semitic) 'race' has actually existed, with inherited biological or physical characteristics. On the contrary, it is certain that from the beginning Afroasiatic-speakers would have mingled with other peoples and given them new languages, while absorbing cultural elements in return. It must be stressed that 'Indo-European' and 'Afroasiatic' are essentially linguistic terms. Sadly, there has in the past been a long tradition, largely German, of maintaining that civilisation was given to Africa by a 'white, Caucasian race', called 'Hamitic' (the old name for the non-Semitic branches of Afroasiatic). This unfortunate theory was used in Belgian colonial policies for governing Rwanda. In the 1930s the Belgians, when conducting a census in Rwanda, identified those members of the population who owed ten or more cows as 'Tutsi', and thus as constituting a superior, civilised 'Hamitic' aristocracy of northern origin. Those who owned less than ten cows were identified as 'Hutu', and thus as constituting an inferior, primitive 'race'. Unfortunately, many Rwandans believed this nonsense, and the result has been the recent genocide.[10]

In contrast to this kind of all-embracing racial theory I have sought merely to discover the similarities between the religion of one Afroasiatic-speaking people and another. Thus I have begun by summarising the arguments put forward in Daum's *Proto-Semitic Religion* (*Ursemitische Religion*), published in 1985. My first chapter simply sets out Daum's evidence and conclusions, presenting the contents of a highly specialised and technical German academic book to a wider public. I have followed the order of Daum's materials as he uses Yemeni folktales and customs, together with inscriptions, to reconstruct ancient South Arabian religion and then make comparisons with the rest of the Semitic field. Thus I am immensely indebted to Daum for what seems to me to be an all-important breakthrough on his part: without his invaluable achievements in studying the Semitic branch of the Afroasiatic field I could never have envisaged studying that field as a whole.

The five remaining chapters consider the other five branches of the Afroasiatic domain in turn. In the second chapter, on Egypt, I have made much use of classical Greek writers (in effect the anthropologists of their time), while giving weight to the criticisms of them made in recent commentaries by professional Egyptologists, in the light of the indigenous Egyptian evidence. For the third chapter, on North Africa, I have again used classical sources, together with the work done on them by modern scholars, before proceeding to materials concerning the Canary Islands and the results obtained by social scientists. Chapters 4 to 6 are almost entirely dependent upon the labours of anthropologists in West Africa and Ethiopia.

This dependence upon the work of social scientists, mainly French and German, has, as noted above, been fraught with worrying complexities. French emphasis on 'dualism' as supposedly universal has often obscured the authentically Afroasiatic character of many pairs of opposites. Here I have used the words 'dualistic' and 'bipolarity' in very loose senses, to cover a general tendency to think in terms of pairs, before endeavouring, in a concluding section, to establish what 'dualism' is. In my conclusions I have also tried to decide what the essential nature of the Afroasiatic religious heritage is, and how it has influenced the Bible and monotheism.

Throughout this study the reader will find traces of an older anthropological tradition, linked to the name of the famous Scots anthropologist Sir James Frazer (1854–1941), and emphasising the centrality of fertility, along with the interconnection of myth and ritual and the idea of a 'dying god' of the crops. Elsewhere, when studying Indo-European religions, I have, like other writers, taken the view that this tradition is not particularly helpful. In the Afroasiatic field, however, I find it most useful, probably because it began in the Semitic domain, with the work of another Scot, William Robertson Smith (1846–94). Given the overriding Afroasiatic concern with fertility, it is not surprising that Afroasiatic myths and rituals should reflect each other closely. As for the highly controversial concept of the 'dying god', many specialists will doubtless continue to maintain that this god is not to be found in the ancient literary materials. However, the modern evidence from Yemen and North Africa amply demonstrates that the 'dying god' exists, and indeed is also reborn.

I

Semitic Religion

This chapter is essentially a summary of the evidence and arguments in Werner Daum's book *Proto-Semitic Religion* (*Ursemitische Religion*), published in 1985. I shall set out Daum's interpretations as he relates modern South Arabian folktales to ancient Semitic myths, the Bible and the rites of the Pilgrimage to Mecca. Finally, I shall examine his more recent work on contemporary ritual and legend in South Arabia, as providing further evidence for the study of pre-Islamic religious practices.

The Ancient South Arabian Background

Daum begins his book by looking at the legend of the Queen of Sheba who brings vast riches to King Solomon in the Bible (1 Kings 10: 1–13 and 2 Chronicles 9: 1–12). The legend reflects reality: we know from the surviving annals of ancient Iraq that 'Sheba' is the biblical form of the name of a real kingdom in southern Arabia, Saba', which in the first half of the first millennium BCE was ruled by queens and was involved in trade, notably involving frankincense and myrrh. This kingdom's capital, Ma'rib, possessed a famous dam, one of the wonders of the ancient world, which enabled the population to utilise the seasonal rainfalls of spring and late summer. An economy based on the exploitation of water had existed there from the middle of the third millennium.[1]

Ancient South Arabian Religion

The religion of ancient South Arabia, Daum observes, is known to us almost only through inscriptions, in a script which does not

represent short vowels. Thus we know that the kingdom of Saba' worshipped a high god called 'LMQH, and modern scholars, despairing of finding a convincing vocalisation of this name, have by convention referred to him as 'Almaqah. He was also called 'Raging' and 'Ruiner', as the god of the destructive rainstorm. The animal which symbolised him was the ibex – later the bull also took this role. Alongside him there was a god called 'Athtar, who represented fertility and water as essential to fertility, and was also a warrior-god. When representing water he stood not for the act of raining itself, but rather for the useful flow of water after the rain, in the 'wadi', the Arabian watercourse which is dry except in the rainy season. He was also called Sharqan, 'Coming from the East', 'Rising'. 'Athtar corresponded to the moon. A third deity was the sun, Shams: in Arabic this word is feminine, and so the deity was a goddess. An ancient invocation shows 'Athtar entering Shams' home, meaning that he marries her according to the old Arabian practice of integrating the groom into the household of the bride.[2]

Modern South Arabian Folktales

Modern South Arabian folktales, Daum continues, are generally centred around three characters: a maiden, usually a king's daughter; a young man of no fixed abode, who comes from afar, 'out of the East', and often turns out to be a king's son; and a much older figure, as a rule male, who is normally an evil, oppressive fiend. Most of the tales begin with a maiden's being killed or abandoned to die. Often this is due to a wicked stepmother. In one example the latter's jealousy leads the maiden's father to consult an astrologer, who says that she must be killed, as bringing bad luck to the kingdom. The father tells his son to take the girl into the wilderness and bury her alive. Sometimes we are told that the maiden is taken to a wadi. In another example seven maidens go into the wilderness and to a wadi in order to pick fruit. The youngest has to climb a tree, and is suddenly abandoned by the others and left to die. As these examples show, it looks as if we are faced with adapted representations of human sacrifice.[3]

That the sacrifice of girls was widespread in ancient Arabia has long been suspected, owing to a passage in the Qur'an (81: 8–

9), which depicts the Last Judgement: 'The girl who is buried alive will be asked for what crime she was killed.' In 1978 an inscription of the second century was found in Yemen, containing a ban on the killing of daughters – a practice which, in order to be prohibited, must evidently have been current. In the folktales, whenever the exposure of the girl is depicted as taking place at a given time, it is always evening. When we are not explicitly told that she is brought to a wadi this is nonetheless clear enough from references to rainfall and vegetation. Often the place is on the mountainside, at the 'head of the wadi'. The girl, who is just reaching marriageable age, is offered to a water-demon, and in return he grants water. In a few texts the girl actually turns into new vegetation. The rain-demon is dark, and represented by dark clouds. He takes the girl when night has fallen. Since she disappears at sunset she presumably corresponds to the sun. In one text she is actually called 'Daughter of the Sunrise'. Elsewhere she is referred to as a 'white dove' – a symbol of the sun in ancient Egypt and Syria.[4]

The Black God

The rain-demon, Daum remarks, is described in the folktales as being old. We are told that a demon of this kind can have no sons or daughters. He is all-powerful and infinitely rich. Thus he seems to be identical with the supreme or only god of Semitic-speakers: the God of biblical and Islamic monotheism. In the folktales a young hero comes and kills this god. The god appears like a black cloud – the cloud of the South Arabian rainstorm, which is characterised by extreme violence, darkness and capacity for inspiring terror, and ends very quickly. The black cloud brings an enormous flooding, and then a powerful thunder flash, before the storm moves off, the after-effect being a flow of water in the wadi.[5]

In a couple of the folktales the father takes his daughter into the wilderness and says that he must go and urinate. Then he disappears. Later the girl sings a song:

> Father father how much must you wee?
> You've already flooded the wadis and all the flat land

This looks like an ancient prayer for the rain to end: the father has been replaced by the rain-god. In one version a young man, called Khidr ('The Green One'), now appears, rescues the girl and marries her.[6]

The Young Hero

The hero, a prince, has left his home and wanders through the world, stopping and setting off again according to a rhythm of six-month intervals. Usually he kills the black rain-god in the night. Daum argues that since to kill a god he must himself be a god, he has to correspond to the moon. Now in one tale the decision to offer the girl to the rain-god is taken when she is three days old, and she is brought to him fifteen days after her birth. According to the Arab lunar calendar the moon of the first three days of the month is called Hilal ('New Moon'). From the fourth night on it is called Qamr ('Young Moon'). The full moon is called Badr. Among Semitic-speakers the day (in the sense of a twenty-four-hour interval) is seen as beginning at dusk. Thus the night of the full moon falls on the fifteenth day of the month. In Yemen weddings take place normally at the full moon, otherwise in the first half of the month, but never in the second. The folktales also usually show the girl being exposed and rescued on the night of the full moon. In one tale the prince comes from the east and meets the girl whom he is to marry in the evening, at a well, from which girls are drawing water (cf. the stories of Rebecca and Rachel in Genesis 24 and 29). The marriage is arranged, and the prince is supposed to return for it one month later, on the first of the month. He arrives two days late, not surprisingly, since his name is Qamr ('Young Moon').[7]

In another tale, entitled *Donkey's Skin*, the hero comes to a wadi, finds a dead donkey and clothes himself in its skin. This must represent fertility, since the donkey is the most important symbol of virility in oriental folklore. All the tales insist that the old god can be killed only with his own sword, which the young god gets hold of, killing him with just one blow. This sword is evidently the old god's lightning. The marriage of the hero is celebrated with a week-long feast, perhaps recorded in ancient South Arabian inscriptions, where we read of a feast being given for "Athtar of the Flowing'.[8]

Pilgrimages in Southern Arabia

The Yemeni folktales, Daum points out, are echoed in aspects of contemporary southern Arabian pilgrimages. Of these the most important is the annual pilgrimage to the tomb of a legendary pre-Islamic prophet, Hud, in southern Yemen. The tomb is situated on the slope of a mountain, where one wadi runs down into another. Early Islamic sources show that it existed before Islam. When the pilgrims prepare to set off on the pilgrimage they sing to Hud:

> The prophet is in his tomb
> Ever interceding for his people
> While the cloud shades him …
> So that the irrigating water should not be endangered at night
> by the cold period
> We shall build a tent for the prophet and bring him a bride

On the journey the pilgrims sing:

> By night set out o travellers of the night …
> Rain will fall and the peasant will greet the flood
> And he who spends the night travelling
> Will in the morning have the profit

One does not travel by night in South Arabia. The verses look like reminiscences of a nocturnal offering of a girl to a rain-demon.[9]

As for the pilgrimage-ritual itself, it takes place when the moon is full, in the month of Sha'ban. When the pilgrims arrive at the site they eat, sing and spend the night there without actually visiting the tomb. The next morning they bathe in the river and then go in a procession to the grave. This sequence of actions is that of a Yemeni wedding. Then the pilgrims go down from the tomb and sing:

> O you who make lightning flash in the East
> O you who blow from the tomb of Hud

Here Daum thinks that the young hero is being addressed (after he has killed the rain-demon), and finds support in the verses which follow:

O honoured one The winds of good fortune blow
In darkness lightning flashed from the furthest highlands
And I was reminded of nights now passed away around Hud ...

Later in the day the pilgrims cut the sinews of the hind legs of the animals which they have brought, and then kill them: this is a pre-Islamic mode of sacrifice, traditionally performed in the month of Rajab, but also (as here) in that of Sha'ban.[10]

We may add at this point that in Islamic legend Hud's people once prayed for rain. God produced three clouds, white, red and black, and told one of their representatives to choose between these. He chose the black one, and a storm destroyed everyone except Hud and his supporters.[11]

Daum, at this point in his argument, draws attention to figurines representing an ibex, which, he was told, were manufactured in connection with the pilgrimage to Hud's tomb. Pilgrims either leave them with their children when they go on the pilgrimage, or take them with them. The figurines have the face of a man – presumably this is the god 'Almaqah, who, as we have seen, was symbolised by an ibex in ancient south Arabia. They are, therefore, highly significant, since, as we shall see in a moment, in the ritual hunt of the ibex in modern Yemen the ibex is called 'the old man': doubtless 'the old man' is identical with the rain-demon evoked in the pilgrimage to Hud's tomb.[12]

Pilgrimages are also made to the shrine of a figure called 'Lord Rain' in southern Yemen. It is situated in a ravine, at the 'head of the wadi'. Daum has himself witnessed a rainstorm here and noted that when it ends the sun, so often oppressive, reappears as a most welcome sight. The pilgrimage to this shrine takes place at the full moon, in the month of Rajab.[13]

The Ritual Hunt of the Ibex in Modern Yemen

Further parallels are found by the German orientalist in the ritual hunt of the ibex, which has continued in South Arabia up to the twentieth century, and is evidently pre-Islamic. Its aim is to produce rain. The hunters have formal meetings in preparation for it. Finally they have a feast, on a Friday evening. The actual hunting takes place the next week. During the hunting the hunters fast until their leader gives them permission to eat. Only the male

ibex is hunted. When it is caught one hunter says, 'Your neck, ibex!' and stabs it in the neck. This is against Islamic law, which insists that an animal must have its throat slit with the words 'In the name of God'. Afterwards the hunters shout, 'The old man has been killed!' On the next Friday morning the ibex is brought to the village from which the hunters have set off. In the evening a second feast is held. On the Saturday morning a procession, known as a 'wedding procession of bridegrooms', goes to a nearby wadi and then back to the village.[14]

In Yemen 'the second Friday of the month' means the full moon. Feasts are not held later in the month. It seems that originally the 'wedding procession' would have taken place on the month's fifteenth day. Now the ibex is clearly hunted not for the sake of its meat, but for the actual killing and for its horns, which are kept as a trophy and valued for the number of rings visible on them. In South Arabia such a ring is called a *rajab* – the name of a month. Before Islam (and its adoption of a purely lunar calendar independent of the year's seasons) this month of Rajab, the most important from a religious perspective, immediately followed the coldest period of the year, and a little after it came the spring rain. In the twentieth century the hunt has taken place either at the coldest or at the hottest time of year, the latter being followed by the late summer rain.[15]

The Ritual Hunt in Ancient Inscriptions

This hunt of the ibex is mentioned in ancient South Arabian inscriptions. There a 'hunt of 'Athtar' is linked to a ritual feast. The idea, thinks Daum, is that the hunt is done for the sake of the god 'Athtar. One inscription shows 'the community of 'Athtar' confessing and doing penance after failing to perform the hunt. This failure, we are told, resulted in a very poor supply of water in spring and late summer. Moreover, a relief carved on a rock depicts an ibex with the words for 'spring' and 'late summer' on either side. Next to the ibex is the symbol which shows that a word begins with a vowel: this symbol is used elsewhere to represent 'Almaqah. As has been noted above, ''Almaqah' is a purely conventional vocalisation for the name 'LMQH, which has long puzzled the specialists. Daum now argues that this should be

vocalised as "Il Muqah', meaning 'The God Who Waters Intensively'.[16]

Marriage-Customs in Yemen

All the materials analysed so far are found by Daum to be reflected in southern Arabian marriage-customs. In southern Yemen, until around 1960, these were as follows. The bride is brought into her house around dusk. Half an hour later an old woman throws a large green cloth over the bride's head, crying out, 'O Maryam, now you become the wife of so-and-so!' The other women present cry out, 'O Khayba'an!' 'Maryam (Mary)' is an ancient Semitic name, thought by scholars to mean 'mistress, lady'. 'Khayba'an' is explained by the Yemenis as meaning 'devil', but means literally 'The Hider' (someone who hides a girl from the sight of the world). The bride is expected to be surprised, weep, fall down and sleep on the spot until midnight, while the women make merry around her. At dawn she is bathed. This concludes the first stage of the proceedings. In a second stage the bride has her hands and feet painted with henna, in order, we are always told, to protect her from evil powers. Now in one folktale, entitled *Darkness*, a girl who has been exposed in a wadi ends up in the house of a witch. The girl escapes death by rubbing henna on her feet and cow dung on the feet of the witch's children: the witch, being short-sighted, kills her own children instead. In a similar folktale the girl is called 'Henna-leaf'. The point is that the evil mistress of the wadi is a flesh-eating beast, and thus will not eat a girl who has turned into a henna-plant. After the henna-painting the bride has her hair plaited, except for a few strands on her forehead. These are then cut off by her father. (A similar hair-cutting ends the Pilgrimage to Mecca, 'de-sacralising' the pilgrim.) In the evening feasting takes place. A third stage begins the next morning. The groom visits the bride's mother, who puts his hand on the bride's head and says, 'You are now her husband.' This is the wedding-ceremony itself. In a fourth stage, in the evening, the groom goes in a procession from his house to the bride's, looks at her and goes back home. Around midnight she is brought to his house. What is most significant here is that the actual wedding takes place at the home of the bride.[17]

In the south-east of Yemen the Mahra people, who represent the surviving old South Arabian element of the country's population, integrate the bridegroom into the bride's home. Near them are Arab tribes who are, in general, culturally similar to varying degrees. The tribe most similar to the Mahra has weddings at the bride's home, with the couple staying there for a year before going to live in the home of the groom. The tribes least similar to the Mahra also marry at the bride's home, but the couple stay there for only a week. Tribes whose characteristics fall between these two groups have stays of varying lengths, longer than a week but less than a year. Thus the original South Arabian practice of integrating the groom into the bride's household is well reflected in contemporary evidence from south-eastern Yemen, and contrasts with the usual Arabian practice of integrating the bride into the home of the groom.[18]

Northern Yemeni weddings follow a pattern similar to the traditional southern Yemeni one, but the last day has a different sequence of events. Dancing and singing go on until dusk, and then there is a procession to the bridegroom's house. In this procession candles, herbs, eggs and drums are carried. Traditionally, the groom is supposed to wear a sword. When he reaches his house a song is sung:

> Welcome Welcome
> You perfect full moon
> O new moon
> You who have thrust through
> The darkness with your sword

Around midnight the bride is brought to the groom's house, and in front of the threshold a ram is sacrificed. She must step over the ram into the house, putting her right foot on it in the ancient gesture of the oriental ruler who has annihilated his enemy. A dagger or rifle is put on the threshold itself. The flesh of the ram is given to the poor (indicating that it is killed in a ritual act of war, not in order to be eaten). This sacrifice is called 'Sabah' (Morning).[19]

In Yemen the last day, that of the actual wedding itself, is a Friday, and always in the first half of the month. An old woman told Daum that the second Friday of Rajab was the best date,

followed by the first Friday of the same month and the first two Fridays of Sha'ban. The two earliest recorded Yemeni weddings date from 1843: it was on the second Friday of Rajab and the first Saturday of Sha'ban that they took place.[20]

The Yemeni folktales usually show the young hero being integrated into the family of his bride. Some stories, however, have a different plot. In these the girl actively and intelligently helps the hero in his task; the evil enemy is female; the killing is done not with a sword, but by fire or stoning or with a sacrificial knife; and the girl marries into the hero's household. These stories of 'virilocal' marriages have, like the 'virilocal' weddings of northern Yemen, sacrifices or killings on or in front of a threshold or the rocky wall at the end of the wadi.[21]

The 'Little Pilgrimage' to Mecca

Alongside the annual Great Pilgrimage to Mecca, which has to be performed in the twelfth month of the year, Islam recognises as meritorious a 'little pilgrimage', which can be performed at any time, known as the 'Umra. Modern scholarship has established that this is a pre-Islamic rite, originally celebrated in the month of Rajab, in spring. It is essentially connected with Mecca's central sanctuary, the Ka'ba ('Cube'). Mecca itself lies in a wadi, in the deepest part of which there is a famous well, beside which the Ka'ba stands. Sometimes a violent torrent of water floods this area. Daum points out that nobody would have erected a building here, where flood-damage is inevitable, unless a water-cult had been intended. The Ka'ba is a cube-shaped building, about 12 metres long and 10 metres wide, and about 15 metres high. Its four corners face the four points of the compass. The eastern corner has the celebrated Black Stone built into it. Below the top of the north-west wall there is a water-spout. The rite of the 'Umra, in the Islamic period, consists of a sevenfold circling of the Ka'ba, drinking from the well, a sevenfold running between two nearby hills and a final 'de-sacralisation' by the cutting of the pilgrim's hair. Scholars have decided that the running has been substituted in the Islamic period for a pre-Islamic animal sacrifice. As for the circling of the Ka'ba, it starts at the eastern corner and then proceeds anticlockwise. A prohibition attributed to

Muhammad forbids performing this naked: evidently, before Islam nudity was the rule.[22]

Further evidence, Daum argues, shows that this ritual is essentially concerned with water. In popular belief all the rivers of the world come to the well by the Ka'ba in Rajab, and at the full moon in Sha'ban the water in the well swells up so much that it would overflow if the pilgrims did not drink it up. A twelfth-century visitor reports ceremonies involving water at this date. The pre-Islamic animal sacrifice in the 'Umra was apparently performed early in the morning, and the flesh was left on the ground or given to the poor. A fourteenth-century traveller says that at the start, middle and end of Rajab military processions went out of the city and mock battles were staged.[23]

In the folktale *Donkey's Skin*, as Daum has already noted, a young prince comes to a wadi, finds a dead donkey and clothes himself in its skin. Then he comes to a city ruled by a sultan with seven daughters. Outside the city is a pond. The prince swims in it, nude, and the youngest daughter sees him and falls in love. The sultan decides to marry his daughters off, by having them stand on the roof of his castle while armed suitors ride round it in a circle: the daughters are to choose their husbands by throwing fruit for them to catch. Six daughters duly make their choices, and then the youngest chooses the prince. The sultan then decides to fight a more powerful sultan nearby, who in a similar tale is compared to black clouds. 'Donkey's Skin', as the prince is called, goes back to the wadi, gets a magic sword from a fairy and proceeds to defeat the enemy. He becomes his father-in-law's successor.[24]

The wearing of a donkey's skin is, in oriental popular belief, a clear and obscene manifestation of virility. Thus the prince who circles the castle clothed in a donkey's skin is perhaps to be linked to the obscene male dancing, with animal masks, mentioned by St Gregentius, Bishop of Zafar in Yemen in the sixth century. The prince's marriage would have involved the cutting of his hair, as in the 'Umra.[25]

As for the word ''Umra' itself, it is linked to the verb meaning 'to cultivate an abode or piece of land, looking after it so that a home does not remain unlived-in'. The noun also means 'the entry of the newly-married husband into the home of his wife's parents.' This is indeed an apt name, given the links between

marriage and the moon already noted, for a ceremony which copies the movement of the moon, passing from west to south and then to east in the course of the month.[26]

The Greater Pilgrimage to Mecca

Daum now turns to the Greater Pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj. This represents a pre-Islamic ritual, performed in the mountain wadi of 'Arafa, to the east of Mecca. Before Islam it took place in autumn, and began on the afternoon of the ninth day of the 'Pilgrimage-month', at the wide, lower end of the wadi, in front of a hill called the 'Mountain of Beneficence (or Rain, 'Rahma')'. The rites start with the famous 'halting' or standing and waiting, now seen as holding oneself before God, but originally linked with the hill itself. After dusk the pilgrims run up the wadi. In pre-Islamic times this running began exactly at dusk, in a wild rush, a 'flooding' as in a rainstorm. After a time there is a new 'halting' until dawn, at the hill of Quzah. 'Quzah' is the name of a pre-Islamic god of the rainstorm, who in Islam becomes an angel ruling over the clouds, or, in one tradition, the Devil himself. The name means 'He Who Urinates'. In early Islam a fire was lit at this spot, but now candles are lit instead. A Yemeni folktale shows men standing before the dwelling of the rain-demon on the same night of the month. Nowadays the resumed 'flooding' of the pilgrims up the wadi from here takes place in the second half of the night, but before Islam it began at dawn, as the sun's rays appeared on the summit of a mountain called Thabir, meaning 'Strong Protector'. Traditionally the pilgrims have cried out, 'Enter the light of the morning (or, 'Arise'), Thabir, so that we can make our charge!' They come to the highest and narrowest part of the wadi and throw stones at a construction which symbolises the Devil. With the sun illuminating the whole wadi, animals are now sacrificed. Afterwards the pilgrims are 'de-sacralised' by having their heads shaved. The name of the sacrifice, Adha, means the time of morning when the sun stands clearly over the horizon – in Yemen an hour and a half after dawn. It takes place on the slope of Mount Thabir, at the steep pass where the wadi begins. Subsequently there are three days of joyful celebrations, called the days of Tashriq, meaning 'Sunrise'.[27]

The pattern of the Greater Pilgrimage is reflected in the folktale *Darkness*. Here a girl and her brother are exposed by their father at the behest of their wicked stepmother. He takes them to the lower part of a wadi, where there is a small hill. There he says that he is going to urinate, and abandons them. They wait for hours and call out:

> O our father How much will you wee?
> You have watered the wadi's barren emptiness ...

(The day before the Greater Pilgrimage is called the 'Day of Watering'.) In the night a white bird appears and nourishes the children. It has to disappear at dawn, being the sun itself, and also the children's dead mother. They spend quite a long while living in the wadi, protected by their mother and hiding in a cave. Thus they appear to symbolise the underground existence of vegetation in the winter. Eventually the bird realises that she is about to die at the hands of the stepmother, and tells the children to flee if they see a black cloud appear at dawn. They spend the night worrying and waiting. When dawn comes they do indeed see a black cloud, and run away from their cave up the wadi. Thus the covering of the dawn by the black cloud corresponds to the dusk on the first day of the Pilgrimage. The children come to a hut inhabited by a witch called 'Darkness'. She intends to devour them in the night, but the girl is suspicious and stays awake all night long. When dawn comes again the children resume their panic rush up the wadi. The witch pursues them until the sun illuminates the higher, narrow part of the wadi – this would be about an hour or so after dawn. Now they are in front of the steep rock face at the head of the wadi. A herdsman is standing above, and the girl promises to marry him. He rescues the children with a rope. As the sun shines down into the ravine the herdsman and the girl burn Darkness up with a rope. After that they get married.[28]

The Passover

Daum continues by pointing out that the ancient feast of Rajab, which survives in the 'little pilgrimage' to Mecca, corresponds to the Jewish Passover (as was first noticed in 1840). The oldest

instructions for the latter are found in Exodus 12. There has to be a sacrifice of a one-year-old male lamb or a kid which must take place at dusk at the full moon in the first half of the year in spring. Some blood must be smeared on the door posts and the lintel of the house. The point of the biblical story is that either the animal or the eldest child of the family must be killed: the Israelites will save their eldest children by performing the sacrifice, but the Egyptians will not. None of the animal is to be left: any uneaten parts must be destroyed by fire. It is to be eaten with unleavened bread, and its bones must not be broken. No uncircumcised male may eat any of it. This ritual has been seen as a feast of nomads, but Daum objects to this idea, pointing out that nomads' tents have no lintels. Moreover, in ancient times Semitic-speakers did not circumcise boys before the age of fourteen: to exclude children from a meal would be unthinkable among nomads. He argues that the ancient Rajab feast was originally an annual ritual marking the end of a rainy season, as is shown by a formula in the Yemeni folktales: 'Water stood in the wadi, enough for one year.' This does not fit the Yemeni climate, with its twice-yearly rainy seasons, and must have cone from somewhere else. The injunction to burn surplus meat would also be unthinkable for nomads (they always preserve it carefully), and is comprehensible only as demanding the complete annihilation of the animal, which symbolises the rain-demon himself.[29]

As for the unleavened bread, this is paralleled by another stereotyped element in the Yemeni folktales. The hero tells the demon that he is strong enough to kill him with a single blow because his mother gave him baked bread, as opposed to uncooked gruel. Originally humans ate uncooked gruel, until, perhaps around 8000 BCE, they found that it was possible to bake this mixture of flour and water on hot ashes or stones. Thus the killing of the demon in the folktales represents not only the end of the winter rain-season, but also the victory of civilisation over raw nature. This belongs to the 'Neolithic Revolution' of sedentarisation, domestication of sheep and goats and the discovery of bread (which remained unleavened for millennia). The roasting of the animal in the Passover sacrifice would fit this period well, since it preceded the invention of pottery (around 7000 BCE), which enabled meat to be cooked in containers. Such antiquity

would also fit the prohibition of breaking the bones, which looks like a survival of the earlier hunter–gatherer culture. Circumcision is also something which goes back to the Stone Age. Recent archaeological discoveries have shown that sedentarisation began independently of the practice of agriculture on the outskirts of the mountains stretching from northern Syria to western Iran. Hunting, fishing and gathering of nuts and wild cereals continued, and from the tenth to the seventh millennia domestication of animals and the sowing of crops followed.[30]

The people in the Yemeni folktales also live on the outskirts of mountains, from which small watercourses come down to human dwellings. The climate is moderate to cool, unlike that of Arabia, and some of the distant mountains are covered in snow. Here the annual winter rainy season is oppressive, as the water pours destructively down the mountains. Since the summer and the sun are not oppressive we must be somewhere to the north of Arabia. There is no direct mention of agriculture, but there is bread. Hunting (along with gathering wild fruits) is the main source of sustenance. The folktales belong to the period of transition from hunting to domestication of animals and agriculture: in one tale the heroine is called Wasila al-Dhahab, meaning 'the girl of the rain-flood for the irrigation of the fields by the wadi', while in another the hero is called Khidr, 'The Green One' – an ancient mythical fertility-figure much venerated in Islam, and identified by Syrian Christians with St George (aptly, as the killer of a dragon). Thus the climate of the folktales is that of the Fertile Crescent. The proto-Semitic spring festival marks the transition from the dark winter to the light of summer. This is illustrated by its name: the Passover is called Pesah in Hebrew, Fisha in Arabic, but these are in fact just different forms of the same word, the root of which in Arabic, f-s-h, means 'dawning light'.[31]

The Feast of Tabernacles

In the Bible, Daum observes, we find also the Feast of Tabernacles, sometimes known simply as 'The Feast'. Here the Hebrew word Hag, 'Feast', is the same as the Arabic word for the Greater Pilgrimage to Mecca, Hajj. It comes at the full moon of the month of Tishri, in the autumn, five days after the Day of

Atonement (Yom Kippur). On Yom Kippur a goat is sacrificed and another taken into the wilderness or thrown over a cliff. This, like the Hajj's sacrifice (originally performed in autumn), happens on the tenth day of the month. The Feast of Tabernacles is seen as happening 'at the end of the year' (Exodus 23: 14–16), and is to be celebrated in 'huts of leaves', the 'Tabernacles' themselves (Leviticus 23: 33–43). The end of one year is of course the beginning of another: alongside the start of the Jewish religious year in spring the Jews have also had a 'New Year' in autumn, on the first of Tishri. Most of the Semitic-speaking peoples have had this 'doubling' of the New Year. This feast is a happy one, characterised by illumination with candles: it is a feast of light. The huts of leaves must be under the open sky (Nehemiah: 8: 14–17). Now the feast is linked with water, and in particular with the Pool of Siloam at Jerusalem. In antiquity processions went to this pool at the time of the feast, and prayers for water were offered. We are told that peoples who fail to observe the feast will have no rain (Zachariah 14: 16–17). Jesus is presented as speaking at this feast and proclaiming himself as a source of water (John 7: 37–8). According to Muslim tradition Khidr, 'The Green One', bathes in the Pool of Siloam – as we have seen, his name is given to the hero who corresponds to the god of useful water. The 'huts of leaves' are made with green branches, out in the open, just as, in the South Arabian materials, the girl is covered with a green cloth or taken into the wilderness before symbolically turning into a plant. Both Hajj and Hag ask for rain and are also rituals that guarantee the fertilising water which flows afterwards. Both are followed by days of joyful celebrations, three at Mecca, seven at Jerusalem (like the seven after the weddings in the Yemeni folktales).[32]

The difficulty here is that this autumn feast is in substance identical with the spring one. In the sacrifice the rain-demon is symbolically killed, ending the actual raining: this is illogical in an oriental autumn. Daum, in order to solve the problem, designates the spring festival as 'Proto-Semitic' and the autumn festival as an 'Old Semitic' copy of it. The latter must be due to a change of climate, a transition to great dryness, with entirely dry summers and moderately moist winters. Proto-Semitic myths, as we have seen, belong to a climate with an oppressively rainy winter and a

mild, welcome and moderately moist summer. Thus the Proto-Semitic spring feast looks back to a disagreeable season and forward to a green one. If, as the result of a change of climate, this feast was repeated in the autumn, it would logically concentrate on desire for rain. Thus the shift in emphasis from ending the rain to making the water come is entirely explicable.It seems probable that in the fourth millennium BCE, or at the start of the third, in wide areas of the Middle East, a dry period began which has lasted to our own time. Another explanation for an autumn festival would be a migration of Proto-Semitic speakers from northern, rain-soaked mountains to the dry plains of the Middle East. This autumn festival is not found in South Arabia because the monsoon winds bring rain there twice a year, and so an additional ritual for asking for rain in autumn is not necessary.[33]

The Sex of the Deities

As Daum has already noted, in some of the Yemeni folktales the water-demon is represented by a female figure, for example the witch 'Darkness'. Some texts also present a brother beside the girl who is offered in sacrifice, and sometimes the girl plays an active role, on occasion acting like a male warrior, while her male ally is, as it were, 'feminised' and weak. Now the water-demon is female in three stories which correspond to the ritual of an autumn festival, and thus to a later, Old Semitic development of the Proto-Semitic spring festival (in one tale there is even a nocturnal vigil on the tenth of the month, as in the Greater Pilgrimage). It is in these stories that the bride marries into the groom's family – again, a later development. Moreover, these three stories portray the girl as an active helper of her liberator. In two of them liberation comes at dawn, whereas in other stories it comes in the night: thus in these two the hero is no longer a lunar figure, nor does he kill with the sword. In another pair of stories, where the male hero is weak and 'feminised', the heroine is the mistress of a spring, representing fertilising water as a result of the reversal of roles. Similarly, in Iraq, in the middle of the third millennium BCE, the masculine name ''Athtar' is taken over by a goddess: the original male god 'Athtar turns into a female deity, whose name evolves into 'Ishtar'. In a parallel process the

Proto-Semitic sun-goddess Shams seems to have turned, in Iraq, into the male sun-god Shamash.[34]

One Yemeni folktale, *My Heart and My Soul*, shows the girl's brother killing the rain-demon and taking over his property: two leopards, named respectively 'My Heart' and 'My Soul'. The brother in effect becomes the water-demon, and is killed in his turn by a prince who marries his sister. Some months later the brother comes back to life (clearly he is a 'dying and rising god') and, at dusk, kills the bride. Daum concludes that the brother who appears in some of the Yemeni folktales is a 'new-style' rain-god, like the ancient Syrian deity Baal, who is also the brother of a goddess. In contrast to this Old Semitic development, a Proto-Semitic pattern is found in another Yemeni folktale, entitled *The Jarjuf* after the name of the water-demon in it. This shows the girl's brother being killed by the demon. His sister, helped by a white female vulture (who evidently symbolises the sun), gathers his bones and buries them: from them grows a maternal tree, and from one of its boughs he is born again. He grows up and kills the demon (in the night).[35]

Circumcision

Daum now proceeds to consider the circumcision of males, a very ancient rite attested among most Semitic-speakers, Australian aborigines, many American Indian tribes and almost all African peoples, but unknown among early Indo-European-speakers. At the start of the twentieth century we have a description, provided by an Austrian expedition, of a collective circumcision performed on the island of Socotra, which lies to the south-east of Yemen and belongs to it. Several pubertal boys, after a special meal, went out of their village in the afternoon to a wadi, where they bathed. Then they returned to the village, where celebrations went on all night and they danced till dawn; there, on a stone bench, they were circumcised at sunrise. Then their heads were shaved. In south-eastern Yemen, in the same period, we have a description of a similar circumcision: here it took place outside the village, after a festive procession. Each boy sat on a stone and, during the actual circumcising, held a sword in his hand. Daum himself has obtained information about circumcision among Bedouin in the

same area. It is done between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, and many boys are circumcised together. First they bathe in the wadi, outside the village. The next morning, at dawn, each boy sits on a rock at the same place. In his right hand he holds a sword or dagger, by the blade. During and after the circumcising he waves it in the air, as if in battle. Martial singing and dancing follow, and a joyful procession returns to the village.[36]

Evidently the waving of the sword represents the killing of the water-demon, and the circumcision is a preliminary to marriage. But where is the bride? To throw light on this problem Daum turns to etymology. The Arabic for circumcision is *khitan*, from the root kh-t-n. Other words from this root designate the 'in-law' relationships: the root's original meaning must have been 'relating oneself by marriage'. *Khatan* in Hebrew means 'bridegroom', and in Aramaic 'the son-in-law who lives in his father-in-law's house'. Thus circumcision and marriage belong together, and marriage is 'uxorilocal'. Since the symbolic killing of the demon is at dawn, we are in the 'Old Semitic' stratum. It is to be noted that the anthropological evidence so far adduced is all from south-eastern Yemen (and an island connected with it), where uxorilocal marriage has been preserved, along with circumcision around puberty as opposed to just after birth. Elsewhere in Yemen further evidence indicates that until recently circumcision was done at the same age and with similar ceremonies. The 'Old Semitic' character of the ritual is echoed in the biblical materials, where we shall find a tell-tale date: the tenth day of the first month.[37] This biblical evidence mentions the use in circumcision of a 'sharp stone' (Exodus 4: 25) and a stone knife (Joshua 5: 2–3). Since metal had been in use for millennia before it would appear that the ritual was already well established long before the end of the Stone Age. (Here we may add that the use of a stone knife in circumcision is attested at Algiers and in Indonesia.[38]) In Exodus 4: 24–6 a strange episode is narrated. Moses, his wife Zipporah and their son are travelling, and stop for the night. God tries to kill Moses, and Zipporah takes a sharp stone, cuts her son's foreskin off and touches Moses' genitals with it, saying, 'You are a bridegroom of blood to me!' Then God leaves Moses alone. Daum points out that this is happening during a nocturnal break in a journey, and that the passage is thus presumably a survival of a

Proto-Semitic myth: Moses kills the rain-god (this is represented by the circumcision) and wins a bride. Here Moses himself is symbolically circumcised by being touched with the foreskin. A second passage is Joshua 5. The people of Israel cross the Jordan and are circumcised with stone knives, on the tenth day of the first month of the year. This is just after the waters of the Jordan have been made to stop and then overflow, in the morning: Joshua and his people have ended their stay in the wilderness, and are now in a fertile land. A third passage is Genesis 17: God enjoins circumcision upon Abraham and says that he will make him extremely fertile.[39]

Jacob

Next Daum examines Genesis 32, where another strange episode shows Jacob, alone at night, by a wadi. Here he wrestles until dawn with an adversary who is clearly God himself. At dawn God blesses him and gives him a new name: Israel. Jacob has in fact won in the fight. This episode is echoed in Genesis 35, where God repeats the renaming and tells Jacob to be fertile: the country will be given to the kings descended from him.[40]

Ancient Syria

Since 1929 important texts have been unearthed at Ra's Shamra, the ancient Ugarit, in northern Syria. These have greatly increased our knowledge of ancient Canaanite religion. Of particular interest for Daum is the Canaanite myth of the goddess Ishtar, which is partly attested in an Egyptian papyrus of the period between 1550 and 1220 BCE. This myth can be reconstructed as follows. A sea-monster threatens gods and humans. He is acting on the instructions of the father of the gods, El, whom the younger gods have dethroned. The gods offer the sea-monster the goddess Ishtar, but her brother Baal kills him. Now the texts from Ugarit show Baal fighting against the Sea and Death. In one myth the Sea demands that El surrender Baal up to him. El agrees, but Baal goes and kills the Sea. It appears that originally El was the real water-god of Canaanite religion, and that the Sea is to be perceived as an emanation from him. Thus Baal is in effect

fighting against El himself. In the myth of Death Baal has evolved into the winter rain-god of the Old Semitic stratum, who is killed in spring by the summer heat-god, Death himself, who is also an emanation of El. Death in his turn will be killed in autumn. This Old Semitic myth also shows us a weakened 'Athtar, who after Baal's death tries in vain to take his throne: in the dried-up climate of the second millennium BCE the ancient god of fertilising water has become a figure of fun. It is to be noted that in the myths of Ugarit El is called a bull – an animal who often represents the 'black god'.[11]

Further Parallels

Daum then adduces parallels from Greece, Niger and Spain. As has long been noted, the Canaanite myth of Ishtar is the prototype of the ancient Greek myth of Andromeda, a Syrian princess rescued from a sea-monster at Jaffa by the hero Perseus. In another Greek myth another Syrian princess, Europa, is abducted by the king of the gods, Zeus, who assumes the form of a bull, takes her into the sea and swims to Crete. In Crete itself yet another Greek myth depicts a monster, the Minotaur, the son of a bull which has emerged from the sea. This monster demands human sacrifices, and is killed in the night by the hero Theseus, helped by a heroine, Ariadne. In Niger, in order to produce rain, a black goat is killed outside a village by a rain-priest, on the fifteenth day of the month which, like Rajab, comes seventh in the calendar. (We shall consider further African examples in Chapters 3 to 6, and in Chapter 2 we shall provide a much expanded treatment of an Egyptian parallel also adduced by Daum.) In Spain the bull-fight goes back to the old Spanish ritual of the 'wedding bull', which originates in the ancient, pre-Indo-European culture of the start of the second millennium BCE. In this ritual the groom brings a black bull to the bride's house: important aspects are the shedding of the bull's blood and the active role played in this by the bride.[12]

Middle Eastern Cylinder Seals

The final body of evidence considered by Daum consists of the representations of a 'winged temple' on ancient Middle Eastern

cylinder seals. This motif is frequently found, over a period of 600 years, from the start of the Akkadian empire in Iraq, that is, from around 2300 BCE, up to the end of the era of the earliest Syrian cylinder seals, 1900–1700 BCE. The seals show a celestial temple with birds' wings being hauled down to earth on top of a bull, which is in the course of collapsing as it is sacrificed by a god. In some Syrian examples we are shown who lives in the temple: a young goddess, who is evidently being rescued by the male god killing the bull. The Syrian seals at the end of the period show a development from the Proto-Semitic to the Old Semitic stratum: the goddess has become an active warrior. In an earlier Syrian example, however, the two figures are accompanied by representations of a crescent moon and the sun (respectively male and female in Semitic languages): these correspond to the Yemeni rescuing hero 'Young Moon' and his solar bride. But here the male figure is undoubtedly Baal, and in a still earlier, Akkadian example the goddess is clearly raining abundantly on the earth. Thus the seals all belong to the Old Semitic stratum.[13]

In Iraq one seal links the 'winged temple' to a type of priest, called the *kalu*. We know from various texts that this priest had the function of 'appeasing the hearts of the gods' with songs and drums. The priest also had to sacrifice a black bull, just before sunrise, on an auspicious day: the bull was led into a temple and the priest would slit its throat and cut its head off. One Akkadian text links the ritual to a myth, in which the young god Bel, who may correspond to Baal but may also represent the Sumerian god Enlil, cuts off the head of the old Sumerian sky-god Anu and skins him. The text explicitly connects this killing with a sudden downpour of rain.[14]

A similar pattern is found in the famous Babylonian epic of creation, *When On High* (*Enuma Elish*). In this epic Anu's son Ea kills the god who personifies the ocean beneath the earth, Apsu, and thereby becomes the god of fertilising water. Then humankind is threatened by a deity who personifies the ocean surrounding the earth, Tiamat. Ea's son Marduk sets out, kills Tiamat and separates heaven and earth. The epic is from around the middle of the second millennium BCE, but clearly resembles a much earlier Sumerian one, in which Ninurta, the son of Enlil, kills a demon and then dams up the destructive water pouring from the latter's

homeland, thereby promoting fertility. Here, then, we appear to have a reflection of the Proto-Semitic myth.[15]

Finally, Daum considers the highly controversial problem of whether there was an ancient Indo–Iranian myth of a young god who killed a dragon and thereby liberated fertilising water. This is certainly attested on the Indian side, where the young god Indra kills a dragon called Vritra. Daum follows German writers in refusing to believe that there was a similar Iranian myth, which would point to a common Indo–Iranian prototype. We may note, however, that Dumézil and his Parisian colleague, Jean de Menasce, produced important Armenian and Middle Persian evidence to show that the Iranian myth did in fact exist.[16] Daum takes the view that the Indian myth was probably borrowed from the Semitic field, as the ancestors of the Indians migrated from their original northern homeland.[17]

The Semitic Contribution

Daum's concluding chapter begins by pointing to the resemblances between the Hebrew Bible and the Babylonian creation epic *When On High*. Just as the latter portrays the killing of sea-deities, the former shows God fighting the sea-monster Leviathan. Similarly, just as *When On High* has Ea make fertilising water come from beneath the earth, so too the Bible's account of creation has God bring fertilising water from beneath the earth's surface (Genesis 2: 6). The idea of creation is evidently linked to this part of the 'Proto-Semitic myth'. However, there is nothing about creation in the Yemeni folktales or the Ugaritic myths. Presumably this is because it was only at a comparatively late stage that the idea of creation was developed into a fully-fledged intellectual concept.[18]

How is ancient Semitic religion to be characterised? Not, thinks Daum, as 'astral religion' – the sun and the moon are really just symbols of light and goodness, and the other stars are absent. Nor as representing 'mother right' (we must note that in recent decades writers in English have adopted this literal translation of the German *Mutterrecht*, instead of the misleading term 'matriarchy', which means 'rule by the mother' – 'mother right' means the valorisation of the mother and her relatives as regards inheritance): rather, we have seen incorporation of the groom

into the bride's family, and a certain development of the role of the heroine. On the other hand, we have seen the importance of sacrifice, as meaning the killing of the supreme god by a younger god. This is central to a religion which looks as if it is originally and authentically 'Semitic'. The name of the supreme god, ''Il', is connected to the Semitic root meaning 'first'. That of the heroine, 'Shams', is the common Semitic word for 'sun'. As for that of the hero, ''Athtar', it seems to come from the root meaning 'the sown land watered by the flood'. The religion appears, as we have seen, to have been originally based somewhere in the areas round the northern frontier of Syria.[49]

It is in this region, and in a long period of sedentarisation, that Daum sees the origins of widespread folktales involving magic. Thus Semitic myth is echoed both in the Yemeni folktale called *Darkness*, discussed above, but also in the well-known German folktale *Hänsel and Gretel*. Here, after the witch is burnt to death early in the morning (as in *Darkness*), the brother and sister come to a large expanse of water, and are taken across by a white duck. The water would appear to correspond to the fertilising flood of Semitic myth, while the white duck would correspond to the white bird in *Darkness*. Similarly, in the German folktale *Mother Holle* a girl throws herself into a well and wakes up to find herself in a lovely meadow: the element of the girl's having to die in order for the fertile meadow to be obtained looks characteristically Semitic.[50]

More Yemeni Evidence

In 1987 Daum published a postscript to his book, an article entitled 'A pre-Islamic rite in South Arabia', in which he refers to fieldwork done by him in a further visit to Yemen in 1986. He describes the tomb of a male 'friend of God' called 'al-Shamsi', 'the sunny one'. It lies in the middle of a dried-up wadi, and is a four-sided structure, like the Ka'ba. Every year there is a pilgrimage to it, and the pilgrims circle it counter-clockwise. However, the main rites take place in a nearby hamlet. Here two poles are erected, one eight metres high, the other seven metres, after sunset. They are washed with water, and after this henna is applied to them. The longer pole is explained by the family of the tomb's keeper

as representing al-Shamsi, while the shorter is described as 'female'. Both poles are decorated with cloth, and boys go up and down them, in order, we are told, to ensure abundance of children. Traditionally bulls, sheep and goats have been slaughtered in the ritual, and a banquet has taken place.[51]

The legend of al-Shamsi is told by the keeper of his tomb as follows. He came from Ethiopia, and had only one eye, in the middle of his forehead. A demon lived in the mountains which overlook the area, and every year demanded a virgin as a bride. She would be sent to him after sunset and killed by him. Al-Shamsi came and beheaded the demon with his sword, where the tomb stands. After this he settled in the hamlet. In another version of the legend we are told that the virgin would be put on the edge of a well, and the demon would emerge from the water and draw her down. The killing of the demon took place in the night of the first full moon after 'the end of the year', and the annual festival should ideally be held then – in September.[52]

As for the two poles, they are paralleled elsewhere in modern Yemen, representing a male and a female figure, and in ancient South Arabian temples, where one finds a water-basin and two columns. Similarly, the Bible shows Solomon's temple as having two pillars and a 'sea of bronze' (1 Kings 7: 15–26). An Islamic source of the ninth century CE relates that before Islam the Christian church of San'a' had two beams, one called 'Ku'ayb' and the other 'Ku'ayb's wife', from which people 'used to seek good fortune'. Another Islamic source of the same period relates that once, in the pre-Islamic era, a young couple had intercourse in the Ka'ba during a pilgrimage, in the night, and were turned into stone. The two stones were erected outside and worshipped with animal sacrifices.

2

Egypt

Our survey of ancient Egyptian religion will focus mainly on the conflict between the sinister and threatening god Seth and the young, heroic god Horus. First we shall look, through the eyes of modern scholars, at Egypt under the dynasties of the old Egyptian kings or pharaohs; then, mainly through the eyes of ancient writers and their recent commentators, we shall examine Egyptian religion in the Persian and Graeco–Roman periods; finally, we shall compare our findings with the Semitic evidence considered by Daum.

Under the Dynasties of the Pharaohs

Contemporary academic discussion of the struggle between Seth and Horus has been largely dominated by the Welsh classicist and Egyptologist John Gwyn Griffiths and the Dutch specialist Herman te Velde. Here, apart from summarising their results, we shall also briefly consider contributions by Gerald Wainwright and John Baines.

Wainwright: a 'nature religion' approach

In 1938 the British Egyptologist Gerald Wainwright published a provocative and rather dubious book entitled *The Sky-Religion in Egypt*. This was written under the influence of the notorious (and now discredited) theories of his compatriot and colleague Margaret Murray (1863–1963), concerning a supposed 'Old Religion' common to many peoples and allegedly preserved over the millennia by European witches. Wainwright thought that this religion could be discerned in the Egyptian materials. Since Seth was a storm-god, and Egypt has hardly any rain, so that what

little rain does fall is useless for agriculture and has been seen as threatening, Wainwright argued that he must be a survival from an earlier period, when the climate would have been different. In that earlier period his storms would have been welcome, but when rainfall almost ceased completely, and Egypt became entirely dependent upon the Nile, he would have been seen as a nuisance and demoted to the status of a devil.[1] Egyptologists have rejected Wainwright's work as ingeniously, but unconvincingly contrived. From our standpoint it seems to have some limited value: Seth is indeed a storm-god, and Egyptian religion does portray him as alarming and dangerous (before, eventually, and in a very late period, turning him into a demon), but in the light of the Arabian materials we may prefer to think that the Egyptians simply saw his darker aspects as essential ingredients of nature, and that Wainwright's reconstruction of a historical development is unnecessary.

Gwyn Griffiths on Horus and Seth: a political struggle?

A more serious contribution to the study of Seth was made by Gwyn Griffiths in 1960. He began by reviewing the evidence of the famous Pyramid Texts, which date from around 2340–2200 BCE. They provide brief allusions to the fight between Horus and Seth: we are told that both gods are mutilated, Horus losing an eye and Seth his testicles. Eventually Horus is victorious and brings Seth before the other gods, who put him on trial. Seth is duly sentenced to be punished. There are puzzling references to Seth's brother Osiris, usually seen as Horus' father. Scholars have taken the view that Osiris represents a subsequent addition to the myth. Later texts give us more details. Seth takes the form of a black pig in order to injure Horus' eye. We are also told of Seth's pederastic activities vis-à-vis Horus. Seth says to the latter, 'How beautiful are your buttocks!' Horus speaks to his mother, Isis, and she tells him how to protect himself from Seth by trickery, inserting his fingers between Seth's buttocks to make him waste his semen. Gwyn Griffiths concludes by arguing that the story of Horus and Seth represents a real, historical and political, struggle between warring factions in Egypt and their eventual union.[2] This argument has been severely criticised by continental European scholars: it looks extremely old-fashioned, and resembles inter-

pretations of Scandinavian and Japanese myths put forward in the 1920s, which saw the 'wars of the gods' as transpositions of conflicts between different peoples.

Velde on Seth: a god of confusion

1967 saw the appearance of Velde's invaluable monograph on Seth. He began by considering the mysterious animal used to represent the god, a quadruped with a long snout, truncated ears and a stiffly raised tail. Much ink has been spilt by scholars in attempts to identify this animal: it has been seen as an ass, a greyhound, a camel, a giraffe, a boar and a jackal (to mention just a few). Velde concludes that the hieroglyph in which Seth is portrayed as an animal does not correspond to any animal known to us today, and that this animal seems to be imaginary.[3]

Even Seth's birth, observes Velde, is an instance of disorder: the other gods are born in an orderly sequence of pairs of twins, which he disturbs. Seth causes abortions. He seems to cause the damage to Horus' eye not by striking him in an open fight, but (this reflects a common Egyptian belief) by having intercourse with him. One magical spell seems to refer to this when it says, 'Your anus belongs to you, Horus, and the potency of Seth will not prevail against you.' Thus it is hardly surprising that Horus seizes Seth's testicles. One myth shows Isis putting Horus' semen on a lettuce, so that Seth will swallow it. Seth duly becomes pregnant, and Horus' semen turns into a golden disc, appearing on Seth's head. Seth is furious when he realises that he has been duped, and tries to seize the disc, but a moon-god, Thoth, quickly takes it and puts it on his own head. This disc apparently corresponds to both the moon itself and Horus' eye. Other texts speak of a ritual 'pulling out' of Seth's finger from Horus' eye, while elsewhere Seth's finger and penis appear to be interchangeable. Seth gives every indication of being infertile, and of irregular sexuality. He jumps on a goddess called Anat when she is dressed as a man, 'deflowers her with a chisel and rapes her with fire'.[4]

The quarrel between Horus and Seth brings a separation between the two gods, which is linked in Egyptian belief to a number of dualistic oppositions: heaven and earth, right and left, north and south, Egyptians and foreigners, and many more. In

particular, as we have observed above, the colour black (although in one instance given to Seth as a black pig) is used to characterise the black, fertile mud produced by the Nile, and thus, by extension, the Egyptian kingdom itself, and this is bestowed upon Horus, while the colour red, as that of the desert sand, is bestowed upon Seth. Finally, the two gods are reconciled. However, this does not lead to a renewal of homosexual activity between them. Stories of such activity belong to the first phase of the myth. In one such story Seth sodomises Horus and then boasts about this to the other gods, who spit in Horus' face: Isis then cuts her son's hands off. These stories illustrate Seth's foolishness and lack of moderation, which make him unfit to rule Egypt, so that in the final compromise the throne is given to Horus. This compromise, however, enables the two gods, reconciled, to be worshipped as a single deity, Horus-Seth. The god who personifies the Nile's annual inundation, Hapy, is made to declare that he establishes the head of Horus on Seth and that of Seth on Horus. Similarly, the pharaoh is seen as representing both Horus and Seth. These two gods, Velde argues, belong to a rich symbolic pattern, not to some illusory political development.[5]

Seth is also the murderer of Horus' father, Osiris. Osiris is the god of the dead, and thus, paradoxically, of resurrection and life itself: he has to be killed so that life can go on. He seems to be killed by drowning. Immediately after his death his corpse has to be guarded from the further harm which Seth can inflict upon it. By killing Osiris, Seth brings about his own death: he is symbolically killed in the sacrifice of animals who represent him. Seth is also obliged to carry the dead Osiris, taking the form of a bull or ship to do so, and thus assisting his resurrection.[6]

It would indeed be wrong to imagine that Seth is an entirely negative force. On the contrary, he plays a very positive role in defeating a snake called Apopis, who symbolises chaos, and consequently protecting the supreme god Re, who represents the sun. Here Seth still retains his character as 'Seth who causes confusion': he is a violent aspect of Re, aggressive and vicious, and is called 'chosen of Re' and 'son of Re'.[7]

This ambiguous character of Seth is illustrated in the Egyptians' experience of foreigners. Since Seth is the god of the latter he is identified with the chief gods that they worship. In Egypt itself

Seth is worshipped in frontier regions, as the god of frontiers and other lands. When foreigners become influential in Egypt Seth is naturally given greater veneration at the pharaohs' court. In the New Kingdom (1580–1085 BCE), with its imperial conquests, Seth is highly honoured: he assists in the conquest of foreign lands. The pharaoh is now the son of Seth, and the name 'Seth' often appears in personal names, some of which present the god as being gracious and kind. However, when the foreigners conquer Egypt the cult of Seth declines: identified with alien despots, he is turned into a demon.[8]

Gwyn Griffiths on Osiris: a king of the royal dead

In 1980 Gwyn Griffiths published an important book on the origins of Osiris and his cult. He emphasised the strong links between Osiris and dead kings, with whom the god was originally identified. Gwyn Griffiths also stressed the significance of the separate identities of the Horus-myth and the Osiris-myth, before the two were combined. He pointed out that though previously-known evidence showed the homosexual relations between Seth and Horus as pederastic, Horus being little more than a child, a recently discovered text presents the two gods as being of about the same age and making reciprocal advances, with Horus as the initiator. Moreover, there is no evidence for the existence of the cult of Osiris before the Fifth Dynasty (2510–2460 BCE). Gwyn Griffiths further observes that although the colour red is often linked with Seth in later periods white is connected with him in early texts. White and Seth are both associated with Upper (or southern) Egypt.[9]

When Gwyn Griffiths proceeds to consider Osiris' connection with water and vegetation he argues that the god's links with fertility are later than his original role as king of the royal dead. (Elsewhere, however, in an encyclopaedia article, he says that Osiris is attached to fertility from an early stage.)[10] By contrast, the god who personifies the annual inundation of the Nile, Hapy, is linked to the concept of abundance. In general, though, Hapy is viewed with apprehension as opposed to positive appreciation of fertilising power.[11]

Later, examining the family relationships in the Osiris myth,

Griffiths analyses the family terms in Egyptian and Semitic languages on the one hand and those in Indo-European languages on the other. The latter show that among Indo-European-speaking peoples marriage was from the beginning 'virilocal', involving the receiving of brides into the groom's family: the groom, after marriage, would continue to live with his parents. But the terms which indicate this, such as 'grandson' and 'husband's brother', are not matched in Egyptian or Semitic. Griffiths points out, however, that the evidence does not support the belief that 'mother right' or 'matrilineal succession' existed in early Egypt.[12]

Baines: the 'fecundity figures'

A sophisticated study of depictions of the inundation-god Hapy was published by the Oxford Egyptologist John Baines in 1985, under the title *Fecundity Figures*. He argues, convincingly, that these figures' long pendulous breasts are those of men, not of androgynous beings. They also have full, heavy stomachs which spill over their belts. In the earliest periods they are red, which is normal for men in Egyptian art, though later they are blue (symbolising water) or green (perhaps representing vegetation). Baines rejects the old name for these figures, 'Nile gods', on the grounds that they do not always represent Hapy, and Hapy is the inundation, not the Nile. He calls them 'fecundity figures' in order to avoid the sexual connotations of 'fertility figures'. They appear to be in mature middle age. Their status is subordinate to that of the major deities, but sometimes they are identified with the latter, and in particular with the supreme god Re.[13]

Afroasiatic or African elements in dynastic Egypt

What other aspects of Egyptian religion under the pharaohs might be thought to reflect Afroasiatic or African traditions? It is worth noting, with reference to the pairs of poles encountered in Yemen, that the earliest Egyptian temples or shrines seem to have had a pair of poles with banners marking an entrance to a courtyard. A pole with a banner was subsequently employed in a hieroglyph to represent the word for 'god' or 'divine'. Another pole would be used to display the deity's emblem in the courtyard itself.[14]

The Parisian historian Nicolas Grimal has pointed to a number of correspondences between Egyptian and African religious ideas: the famous Egyptian jackal-god Anubis resembles a jackal who bestows divine gifts upon humans in the myths of the Dogon people of Mali; both the Egyptians and the Dogon see the universe as being formed by eight original gods; the Egyptian ram-god Amun, crowned with a solar disc, is like an African celestial ram, crowned with a gourd; Osiris is like the Dogon spirit called the Lebe, whose imminent resurrection is proclaimed by the emerging millet; and in both Egyptian and African belief the individual has both a soul and a vital force or essence.[15]

Grimal's work is also useful when he analyses the form of the ordinary Egyptian house, which was divided into two parts, one consisting of reception-rooms for welcoming guests, the other of private rooms for living and cooking. The first part is itself divided into two rooms, one used by women for the cult of the household gods, the other used for entertaining visitors.[16] We shall find similar, though by no means identical twofold divisions in houses in North Africa, and also in Ethiopia.

Further African elements in Egyptian civilisation have been noted by the British writer Michael Rice, in particular the dualisation of all of the state's institutions (notably in the idea of there being two Kingdoms, Upper and Lower Egypt) and the cult of the king's placenta, seen as his twin.[17] The German Egyptologist Eberhard Otto has argued that the Egyptian veneration of stones, pillars, animals and insects is African, while the anthropomorphic aspects of Egyptian religion are Semitic.[18] It is to be observed that, even if matrilineal succession did not exist among the Egyptian population as a whole, in the royal family succession was through the king's principal wife, and she was usually his predecessor's daughter – and thus his own sister.[19]

Herodotus

Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BCE, gives us the best classical account of Egypt. When reading it we must bear in mind that there had been Greeks in Egypt for a very long time before him, and often he is giving us their views rather than his own eye-witness evidence. On the other hand Herodotus appears

to have interrogated his oral sources, notably Egyptian priests, with great energy and enthusiasm. As the Welsh classicist and Egyptologist Alan Lloyd has shown, he is dominated by a taste for wonders and the fallacy that the greater antiquity of Egyptian institutions must demonstrate the Egyptian origin of their Greek counterparts. Moreover, like other Greeks of his time, Herodotus tends to think in terms of polar opposites – a Greek habit which, I suggest, is due to Afroasiatic influences, and is all the more confusing when one tries to assess Egyptian or Afroasiatic dualism.[20] Here we shall consider only those parts of his work on Egypt which are both relevant to our purposes and apparently reliable, and when assessing reliability we shall refer constantly to Lloyd's invaluable commentary (adducing further useful information from it).

Male circumcision

We are told by Herodotus that the Egyptians practise male circumcision. Lloyd observes that, as regards the Predynastic period, all the male bodies found by archaeologists in one cemetery had been circumcised. In general, modern scholars, examining mummified remains, believe that in ancient Egypt males above the age of puberty had usually been circumcised, and the evidence of other Greek writers confirms this. However, the practice was not universal. As a rule it was done between the ages of six and twelve, probably with a stone knife, and there is evidence that it was accompanied by feasting.[21]

Sacrifice

Herodotus provides fascinating information about the sacrificing of bulls. After the bull is slaughtered its head is cut off, loaded with curses, taken away and either sold to Greek merchants or thrown into a river. This, in the light of modern scholarship, would seem to represent a victory over Seth. According to Herodotus the Egyptians perform a rite of lamentation during their sacrifices. Lloyd comments that the sacrifices constitute a symbolic destruction of Seth, and that this rite may have served to ward off his wrath or evoke the distress of his subjects. In

some areas, says Herodotus, the Egyptians never sacrifice sheep – Lloyd observes that the worship of the ram in these areas (notably in the case of Libyans) would make such abstention appropriate. However, Herodotus notes that at the city of Thebes (the modern Luxor), the ban on sacrificing sheep is broken once a year, when a single ram is sacrificed and its fleece placed on the statue of the ram-god Amun. The Libyans also worship this god. Lloyd comments that here an ancient Libyan deity has been given a thick Semitic veneer from the related Baal Hammon, who, thanks to Phoenician colonisation of North Africa, became a chief god there.[22]

A Digression

At this point of his description of Egyptian customs Herodotus digresses to give an account of a visit he made to the Phoenician city of Tyre in what is now Lebanon. In a temple there he saw a pair of pillars, one gold and the other emerald. Lloyd explains that this is a temple dedicated to a god called Melqart, who represents the combination of two deities, Baal and the Sea: thus he is a dying vegetation-god and a sea-god as well. He is worshipped in many Phoenician colonies, notably in North Africa. Scholars think that the temple probably consisted of a courtyard, with the pillars in the middle. Melqart was originally symbolised by a pillar and thought to live in it. The two pillars here are reflected in parallel examples in other Phoenician colonies, in Malta and near Cadiz in south-west Spain, and also, as we have seen, in the Bible's account of the temple of Solomon. Lloyd takes them as reflecting the two deities united in Melqart (one classical writer connects them with fire and wind).[23]

Pigs

After this digression Herodotus tells us that the Egyptians consider pigs to be unclean, and sacrifice them only to Osiris and Isis, together, at a full moon. They have a legend which explains why they do not sacrifice pigs at other times. Part of the animal is burnt and the rest is eaten on the same day – it would be unthinkable to eat it on any other day. Poor people sacrifice

dough models of pigs. Lloyd observes that Herodotus' evidence is borne out by Egyptian sources. We know that pigs were sacrificed at the full moon of the first month in the third of the three seasons into which the Egyptians divided the year (i.e. the hot dry season preceding the inundation), and the legend is probably that of Seth's attack on Osiris. The annihilation of the pig is an annihilation of Seth. Osiris was identified with the moon by the Egyptians, who saw the waning of the full moon as the result of Seth's attack. The sacrificing of dough (and wax) models representing Seth is also well attested in the Egyptian materials.[24]

Phallic rites

Herodotus continues by informing us of the phallic rites celebrated in honour of Osiris. The Egyptians have puppets, the penis of which is almost as large as the whole body: this penis is pulled up and down by the means of strings. Women, led by flute-players, carry this puppet round villages, singing a hymn to Osiris. There is a holy legend which accounts for the size and movement of the penis. Lloyd says that Osiris is often represented with an erect and enormous penis. The use of a string to move or display it is paralleled in modern Africa. As for the legend, it is doubtless that of Osiris' murder: we are told by another Greek author, Plutarch (writing in the early second century CE), that Seth dismembered Osiris' body and Isis recovered and reconstituted all of it except the penis, for which she had to use an artificial model (this disappearance of the penis is, however, contradicted by the Egyptian sources).[25]

Other festivals

Another festival described by Herodotus is that of the goddess Bastet in the ancient city of Bubastis in northern Egypt. Men and women come to this on barges, singing and clapping their hands to the accompaniment of flutes and castanets. When a barge passes a town it comes close to the bank and some of the women shout abuse at the women of the town, while others dance or expose themselves. At the festival itself a vast amount of wine is drunk. Lloyd comments that the insults were probably meant to

protect the townsfolk from the evil eye, while the rite of self-exposure, well-evidenced as practised in front of Egyptian statues (to obtain the deity's fertilising force) was here probably meant to impart fertility to the locals and their fields. Drunkenness at ancient Egyptian festivals is well attested, and licentious feasting has been noted in modern times, in the same area, under the cover of Islam.[26]

Herodotus also mentions a festival at a city called Busiris, also in northern Egypt. He calls it a festival in honour of Isis (while it is really a commemoration of Osiris' death). Herodotus says that after it tens of thousands of men and women beat their breasts in lamentation. People who belong to the ancient nation of the Carians (in what is now south-west Turkey) and happen to live in Egypt cut their foreheads with knives. Lloyd says that this must be the famous festival of the month of Khoiak, the last month of the inundation season. The festival re-enacted the recovery of Osiris' body, Horus' victory over Seth and Osiris' resurrection. As for the Carian ritual, it is part of the cult of the Anatolian god Attis, a dying vegetation-deity whose resurrection was presumably meant to be assisted by the giving of blood. Attis and Osiris were naturally identified with each other.[27]

Sexual intercourse

We are also told by Herodotus that the Egyptians do not enter temples after sexual intercourse unless they have washed in between. Lloyd comments that bathing after intercourse is attested in the Egyptian evidence. We may add that the obligation of ritual ablutions after intercourse was transmitted from Judaism to Jewish Christianity, and continued in Islam, which insists on bathing between intercourse and entering a mosque. Elsewhere Herodotus says that bathing after intercourse is standard practice among the Babylonians and the Arabs.[28]

Animals

Herodotus, describing the well-known veneration accorded by the Egyptians to animals, observes that people perform vows by praying to a given god, to whom a specific animal is sacred, and

shaving their children's heads: the weight of the hair in silver is then given to feed the animal in question. As Lloyd notes, this is confirmed by the Greek writer Diodorus of Sicily, who wrote between c.60 and 30 BCE and explains that the Egyptians do this when their children are cured of an illness. We should add that the practice looks very much like an ancient Semitic rite: the early Arabs used to shave a child's head and then put blood on it in a purification rite. In Islam it has been normal to shave children's heads and then give the weight of the hair in silver to the poor.[29]

As regards the crocodile, Herodotus says that some Egyptians revere it as sacred, whereas others see it as an enemy. Lloyd comments that he is right. When connected with Seth the crocodile could be viewed favourably in areas where Seth was worshipped, but usually it was hated. Herodotus has much the same to say about the hippopotamus, and again Lloyd finds him to be generally correct.[30]

Pairs of obelisks and statues

Later Herodotus tells us of two remarkably high stone obelisks in a temple of Re in central Egypt. Lloyd explains that an obelisk consists of a long shaft and a miniature pyramid at the top, which represents the sacred benben stone. This stone symbolises the primordial hill from which the creator-god originally emerged. He thinks that the practice of erecting obelisks in pairs was probably due to a desire for symmetry, which required that they should flank an entrance. (We, however, see this practice as reflecting Afroasiatic bipolarity.) Later one obelisk was seen as connected with the sun and its counterpart with the moon.[31]

Herodotus also mentions a pair of statues at Memphis in Lower Egypt. The one placed more to the north is called 'Summer' and the one placed more to the south 'Winter': the former is greatly revered, while the Egyptians' behaviour towards the latter is the exact opposite of reverence. Lloyd explains that summer was probably connected with the northerly winds then prevailing, and was seen as bringing the inundation and the harvest – thus it may have been connected with Osiris and fertility. Winter brought the sinking of the Nile, the sowing or death of the corn and a biting

southerly wind – so it may have been linked to Seth and destruction.[32]

Another ritual

Later Herodotus describes a peculiar rite, in which the priests weave a robe in the space of a single day, blindfold one of their number, place the robe in his hand and take him to a road leading to a temple of Isis. He is left there, and the Egyptians believe that two wolves bring him to the temple and back again. Lloyd explains that at the festival in the month of Khoiak, mentioned above, a cloth is said to be made in a single day. The blindfolded priest must represent the pharaoh, who when alive is an incarnation of Horus and when dead is identified with Osiris. When Horus can see he is strong; when he is eyeless he is dead and identical with Osiris. Osiris is taken to Isis as the agent of his resurrection; Horus comes to and from Isis as his mother and the personification of the throne. The two 'wolves' are in fact jackals, symbolising the god Wepwawet, 'Way-opener', who appears in a double form for Upper and Lower Egypt.[33]

Canals and a goddess

Herodotus also provides a description of the temple of the goddess Bastet at Bubastis. It forms an island, since two canals have been dug to sweep round it, almost meeting at its entrance. Lloyd comments that the canals would have made a lake in the shape of a horseshoe, of a type which often surrounded temples of goddesses. Frequently goddesses were thought to have a double character, partly violent and destructive and partly peaceful and creative. Thus the water of the lake was intended, as full of life-giving force, to repress the goddess' destructive aspects.[34]

Kings and gods

According to Herodotus the Egyptians and their priests, when providing a chronology of their kings, say that for several thousands of years no god has ever appeared in a human form. After Horus no gods have ruled over Egypt: the kings have been men.

Lloyd observes, with reference to the widely-held modern view that the pharaohs were worshipped as gods, that the Egyptians were perfectly well aware of the differences between their deities on the one hand and the reigning pharaoh on the other. The latter was an incarnation of Horus but not actually identical with him, and was not venerated in the same way as the gods themselves.[35]

The goddess Wadjet

Herodotus subsequently describes a temple of the goddess Wadjet, 'The Green One', in the city of Buto in Lower Egypt. He says that there is an island in a lake by the temple, and that according to the Egyptians this island floats. On it Wadjet saved Horus by hiding him when Seth was searching the world for him. Lloyd comments that a temple of Wadjet has been found at Buto. The 'floating island' is the most important of the sacred sites which are identified with the primordial hill of creation (and also with the grave of Osiris). Wadjet is indeed believed to have protected Horus there.[36]

The Egyptian class system

We are also told by Herodotus that Egyptian society is divided into seven classes, corresponding to occupations: priests, warriors, cowherds, swineherds, tradesmen, interpreters and pilots. He describes the warriors as extremely specialised: they are not involved in trade and their education is entirely military. Son follows father in this calling, which has special privileges. Lloyd says that here Herodotus is projecting Greek schematised patterns and in particular Spartan institutions into Egypt.[37] We may add that this interpretation seems entirely convincing and most important from the perspective of the comparatist. The Indo-European class system, made famous by Dumézil, consisted of priests, warriors and producers. Its apparent reflection in Herodotus' Egypt has led Dumézil's critics to claim that a system of this kind is simply a universal phenomenon, but Lloyd's analysis shows that here we have only a mirage, mirroring one area of the Indo-European domain (and, in the case of Sparta, a notoriously conservative bastion of archaic Indo-European traditions).[38]

At the Temple of Edfu

Herodotus' information about Egyptian festivals is complemented by a rich collection of inscriptions at the Upper Egyptian temple of Horus at Edfu. The 'Sacred Marriage' there is described in texts of the first century BCE. These have been analysed by the French scholar Maurice Alliot, both in a short summary published in 1950, and also in a long survey in two volumes, which appeared in 1949 and 1954. The year 1954 also saw the publication of a brief sketch of the festival by the Liverpool Egyptologist Herbert Fairman.[39]

It was in late May or early June that the festival began, two months after the Upper Egyptian harvest. The Nile was low and the irrigation canals were dried-up. Four days before the new moon the ceremonies started. An image of Horus' bride, the goddess Hathor, was put on a barge at the city of Dendara. Surrounded by a fleet of other boats, carrying priests and pilgrims, it was towed up the Nile to Edfu. On the day before the new moon an image of Horus was put on a barge at the main temple of Edfu and was taken to meet the image of Hathor at the oldest inhabited site of the city. The next morning the first-fruits of the fields were offered up in sacrifice, and four geese were made to fly. If they failed to fly off to the horizon this was taken as a bad omen, and various propitiatory rites ensued: in particular, four calves were beaten. This was done in memory of Horus' beating calves to make them 'tread out' grain, while hiding his father's corpse. Then the images were taken along the Nile to a hill, where animal sacrifices were performed. After this the images were transported to the main temple and brought into it in a joyful procession.[40]

The next day there began what was called the 'Festival of the Throne', 'the Throne' being the name of the main temple itself. The images were taken in a procession to the desert and a raised spot there: the point was to move from what was seen as the 'low divine domain' of the main temple to what was seen as the 'high divine domain'. Offerings were made to the local divinities in a temple there. Then the procession moved to a nearby courtyard in order to celebrate the annual royal jubilee festival of Horus of Edfu. A red bull was sacrificed. Four geese were despatched to the

points of the compass and Horus was proclaimed king. Four arrows were fired after the geese and palm-branches were presented to the god. A red wax model of a hippopotamus was destroyed, along with two figures of crocodiles. There followed the rite of 'trampling on the fishes', also symbolising the king's victory over his enemies. Everyone spent the night on the edge of the desert.[11]

On the remaining days of the 'Festival of the Throne' the same ceremonies were repeated. Finally, on the fourteenth day, at the full moon, the images of Horus and Hathor were taken back to their initial meeting-place, and food and drink were offered to them. Then they were brought into a temple, and after another sacrifice another triumphal acclamation was accorded to Horus. Lastly, the images were taken back to their respective homes.[12]

Alliot observes that what is most striking is the popular character of the festival (or rather, one might say, double festival or pair of festivals, since the wedding or bringing together of the deities is formally treated as a separate event). There was a great deal of participation by the people themselves, as opposed to other Egyptian festivals which were reserved for the priesthood, behind closed temple doors. Large amounts of food would be distributed, in an atmosphere of constant rejoicing. Egyptian literature provides no examples of any comparable pilgrimages – for a pilgrimage this was, in the case of visitors from Dendara and other towns. Only Herodotus' account comes close to that of the Edfu texts. Outside Egypt one would compare the pre-Islamic aspects of proceedings in and around Mecca.[13]

Plutarch

Yet more information about Egyptian myth and religion is to be found in a work by the Greek writer Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, which he composed shortly before his death in about 120 CE. This has been the subject of an extremely useful commentary by Gwyn Griffiths, who points out in his introduction that the book contains many pitfalls. Plutarch wrote on a great variety of topics, and thus is often criticised as being superficial. Moreover, he was greatly influenced by oriental dualism, which he, like other writers, associated with Iran. By his day this dualism had largely taken

over the ancient Iranian national religion of Mazdaism, so called because of its veneration of a supreme god called Ahura Mazda, 'the Wise Lord'. Although originally this god had stood above two warring spirits, one good and the other bad, a later development identified him with the good spirit and raised the bad one to the level of an equally powerful creator-god.[14] Plutarch heartily approved of this latter perspective and agreed with it. Thus, as in the case of Herodotus, we are faced with a Greek author imposing his own pairs of opposing elements upon Egyptian materials which were already dualistic enough. Further difficulties are caused by the discrepancies between the various calendars used in Egypt itself and in Greece and Rome, and also by the great variety of Plutarch's literary sources. These included an Egyptian priest called Manetho, who lived under Egypt's first two Ptolemaic rulers (325–245 BCE) and wrote about Egyptian religion in Greek.[15]

Pigs

In the course of his preliminary remarks Plutarch tells us that the Egyptians consider the pig to be unclean, because it likes to copulate when the moon is waning. They sacrifice a pig once a year, at a full moon, and eat it. Plutarch's account adds that Seth, hunting a pig when the moon was full, found Osiris' coffin and tore it to pieces. However, continues Plutarch, the Egyptians do not all accept this story. Gwyn Griffiths explains that some Egyptians may have rejected it because Seth himself was seen as a pig. The sacrifice was probably in honour of Osiris (whose connection with the moon is a late development).[16]

Seth's birth

According to Plutarch Seth is supposed to have been born neither at the right time nor at the right place: he burst violently through his mother's side. As Gwyn Griffiths comments, there are striking early parallels in the Egyptian source-materials: in the Pyramid Texts Seth is addressed as 'you whom the pregnant one spewed up when you rended the night ... Seth, who burst forth violently'. Later he is denounced as having 'devised evil before he came forth from the womb, he who caused strife before he came into

being'. Velde observes that Seth's birth disturbs the orderly series of births of the other gods: his birthday marks the beginning of all confusion in the world.[17]

The myth of Osiris

Osiris, says Plutarch, is presented as a king in the Egyptian myth. He gave the Egyptians civilisation and then went on to civilise the rest of the world. When he returned Seth and others conspired against him. They tricked Osiris into getting into a chest and then closed it and floated it out into the Mediterranean. This happened on the seventeenth day of one of the months of the inundation season. Isis went in search of the chest. (We are also told that Osiris had had intercourse with Isis' sister, Nephthys, who was married to Seth.) The chest was washed up on the coast of the country of Byblos (in what is now Lebanon). There it was enfolded and concealed by a tree, which in turn was used by a king as a pillar to support a roof. Isis came to Byblos and became nurse to the king's child. She took the chest with her husband's dead body back to Egypt, and joined her son Horus in the city of Buto. Then Seth, hunting in the moonlight, found the body, cut it into fourteen bits and scattered them. Isis recovered all of these except for the penis, of which she made an image. Subsequently Osiris came back from the underworld and trained Horus to fight Seth. Horus beat Seth and tied him up, but Isis let him go. Seth tried to have the other gods judge Horus to be illegitimate, but his legitimacy was confirmed. Then Seth lost two more battles. Isis, after having intercourse with Osiris following his death, gave birth prematurely to a son called 'Horus the child', who had weak lower limbs.[18]

Gwyn Griffiths points out that Plutarch's presentation of Osiris as a civilising king is Greek, not Egyptian: it is due to the identification of Osiris with the Greek god Dionysus. The chest is clearly a coffin, reflecting Osiris' original character as a god of the dead. As for Osiris' dying on the seventeenth day of one of the months in the inundation season, this too is echoed in the Egyptian papyri – the time of year indicates the concept of vegetation dying to be reborn. Isis' search for Osiris' body is a classic theme of Egyptian literature, which also has vague allusions

to his adultery with Nephthys (a clear reference to this comes in a Coptic source). The episode at Byblos reflects long-established commercial relations between this city and Egypt: it has evidently been put together by Plutarch's source on the model of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*: in this the Greek goddess is also looking for a lost member of her family and becomes a nurse. As regards Isis' subsequently joining Horus in Buto, Gwyn Griffiths observes that he is connected with this region in the Pyramid Texts. The cutting-up of Osiris' body and the scattering of its parts are reflected in the inscriptions in the temples at Edfu and Dendara. However, the disappearance of the penis is not found in the Egyptian sources, which say that it was recovered. The element of Osiris' coming back from the underworld to help Horus is also echoed in the Egyptian inscriptional evidence, and Isis' leniency towards Seth is similarly confirmed by the papyri. On the other hand, Plutarch's account of Seth's trying to have Horus declared illegitimate corresponds only vaguely to the Egyptian theme of litigation between the two gods over the throne of Egypt. Similarly, the two subsequent battles in Plutarch's narrative are only loosely paralleled by the numerous victories of Horus in the Egyptian texts. However, the posthumous union of Osiris with Isis to produce 'Horus the child' is well evidenced in the Egyptian materials.[19]

Seth

Plutarch goes on to say that the Egyptians see Seth as red-complexioned and Osiris as dark. Seth is also seen to have the form of an ass. Thus at some festivals the Egyptians jeer at ruddy-faced men and throw an ass into a precipice, or stamp images of a tied ass on cakes. But along with this hostile behaviour towards Seth the Egyptians also try to appease him with sacrifices. Nevertheless, their habitual sacrificing of red cattle is to be seen as representing their negative attitude towards Seth, since for them an appropriate object to be sacrificed is not something dear to the gods, but rather an incarnation of evil spirits. Gwyn Griffiths comments that abuse of ruddy-faced men is not confirmed, but Seth's association with the ass is amply attested. Appeasement of Seth could refer either to continuing worship of him in Upper Egypt or to qualified respect for his power. The

sacrificing of red cattle is frequently recorded, and Plutarch does well to note the difference between Greek sacrifice, which is essentially a matter of giving pleasant food to the gods, and Egyptian sacrifice, where alongside this pleasing food-offering there is a strong feeling that the victim, which represents the enemy, is unpleasant (while giving the sacrificer the pleasure of victory).[50]

Interpretations of the myth of Isis and Osiris

In considering interpretations of the myth of Isis and Osiris Plutarch begins with that which sees Osiris as the Nile, united with Isis as the earth, Seth being the sea into which the Nile is dispersed. This perspective presents Osiris as fertilising moisture, and Seth (in spite of being the sea) as moisture's dry, fiery and scorching enemy, while Isis is not the whole earth, but that part of it which is made fruitful by the Nile. Seth's infertility is symbolised by his inability to have a child by Nephthys. This interpretation is combined with a view of Osiris as the moon: he dies on the seventeenth day of the month, when the full moon is clearly waning. Plutarch says that this sort of interpretation is both incorrect and correct: it is wrong to say that Seth is drought or the sea, but right to say that he is everything harmful. In dismissing the view that Seth is the sun Plutarch informs us that at the winter solstice the Egyptians lead a cow seven times round 'the temple of the sun, this rite being called the 'search for Osiris', because the goddess in winter longs for water; and they go around seven times because the sun completes its passage from the winter to the summer solstice in the seventh month'. When arguing that on the contrary Seth includes everything irrational and bestial Plutarch tells us that the Egyptians appease him by honouring the animals associated with him, and in a severe drought they consecrate and kill them – in the city known as Eileithyiaspolis, according to Manetho, men seen as representing Seth would be burnt alive in the hottest days of summer.[51]

Here Gwyn Griffiths notes that eventually the Egyptians themselves did indeed give the attributes of the inundation-god, Hapy, to Osiris. Seth, however, is not particularly associated with the sea. Osiris certainly is associated with water in various ways. The equation of him with the moon does occur in late Egyptian texts.

As for leading a cow seven times round 'the temple of the sun' in the 'search for Osiris', Gwyn Griffiths connects this with the rite of 'driving the calves' at Edfu, mentioned above. He points to an inscription there in which we read of 'Horus, who drove the calves to tread Osiris' grave', and argues that the verb previously translated as 'tread' means 'seek'. This ancient agrarian rite (originally part of the cult of the phallic fertility-god Min) is linked to Heliopolis, the 'city of the sun'. The cow, however, manifestly symbolises Isis. We may observe that the sevenfold circling, connected with the solar calendar and desire for water, closely resembles some of the Arabian materials adduced by Daum. When Plutarch speaks of the killing of animals in a drought Gwyn Griffiths says that this is not exactly paralleled in other sources. On the other hand Manetho's statement about human sacrifices probably does reflect a real practice aimed at obtaining water and taking place in one region of Egypt.[52]

The Internal Logic of Egyptian Religion

The materials which we have considered in this chapter have a very strong internal logic. Even allowing for exaggeration in the Greek sources, they point to an extremely dualistic view of the universe. Seth and Horus, Osiris and Seth, Isis and Osiris, Horus and Hathor, summer and winter, red and black, Upper and Lower Egypt – all of these pairs bear witness to an overwhelming bipolarity. Pairs of pillars, obelisks or statues do everything to reinforce this impression, as do the canals dug to repress goddesses' destructive and violent aspects and assist their peaceful and creative ones. What is also striking, however, is that this dualism is not, as has often been asserted by twentieth-century writers, one of order and orderliness. On the contrary, there is a preoccupation with the forces of disorder. Seth is a god of confusion, and also of separation: he creates dualistic divisions by his very nature. Appropriately, he is sometimes represented in the Egyptian texts by a sign meaning 'to separate'.[53] The Egyptians, in their festivals, are 'drunk and disorderly'. They shout abuse and expose themselves. In their hatred for Seth they go to violent extremes, as opposed to observing orderly moderation and restraint. Seth is also worshipped and honoured, again logically enough, as the

necessary god of frontiers and the antithesis between Egyptian and foreigner.

Striking, too, is the emphasis on fertility. Irregular intercourse, we are told, produces blindness, which is the equivalent of death. However, all this is necessary, so that the seeds of the crops, when they die and are buried in the earth, may be reborn. Horus has to lose an eye, Seth his testicles and Osiris his penis: the gods undergo 'qualifying mutilations' so as to perform their designated functions. The resulting proper union of male and female, Osiris and Isis, Horus and Hathor, is identified with the union of fertilising water and the fertilised earth. It is this combination of sexuality with agriculture that is most prominent in Egyptian religion, as opposed to the Indo-European preoccupation with an orderly arrangement of sovereignty and warlike force above fertility.

Parallels with Semitic Religion

The most obvious parallel to be drawn is that between Seth and the rain-demon of southern Arabia. Now the latter, as Daum has observed, is characterised by irregularity in sexual matters: he does not have intercourse with the maidens who are given to him and beget children upon them, but either kills them or suspends them in his hair. A demon of his kind does not, the Yemeni folktale insists, have children.[54] In the same way Seth, in the earliest sources, does not have a child: it is only in the New Kingdom that the pharaoh is called 'son of Seth' (just as it is only in a late development that the God of the Bible acquires a son).[55]

Other parallels also catch the eye, but present greater difficulties for interpretation. Whereas in Arabia pairs of poles or pillars are identified as representing male and female figures, in the case of Egypt we are told that pairs of statues or obelisks symbolise other contrasting elements of nature: summer and winter or the sun and the moon. Elsewhere in the Semitic field a pair of pillars is interpreted as representing vegetation and the sea. On the other hand, circumcision (probably done with a stone knife) and the destructive character of sacrifice with reference to the 'black god' are evidenced in both the Egyptian and the Semitic materials, and lend themselves to interpretation on the same lines:

circumcision is done as an archaic reminiscence of the Stone Age, and the 'black god' has to be completely annihilated. The riotous character of Egyptian festivals is also paralleled in South Arabia.[56] As we have noted, the shaving of a child's head in ancient Egypt corresponds closely to an ancient Semitic ritual. The 'sacred marriage' at the temple of Edfu closely resembles the pilgrimage rite in honour of al-Shamsi in the Yemen. At Edfu the attention given to the four points of the compass echoes the four-pointed orientation of the Ka'ba.

Daum has compared the myth of Osiris, Isis, Horus and Seth with the Yemeni folktale *The Jarjuf*. In this, as we have seen, a young man is killed and torn to pieces by a demon. His sister puts the pieces together, buries them and ensures that a tree shoots up, out of which the young man is reborn as a child. He kills the demon, marries the woman, becomes rich and joins settled society. Daum remarks that various comparatists have seen the Osiris myth as related to Semitic 'myths' of the 'dying god', whereas most Egyptologists have rejected this line of interpretation. His Yemeni evidence points to a Neolithic Syrian origin for the Egyptian story and its royal ideology, since the climatic background of winter rainstorms is alien to Egypt.[57] Here it will be argued contra Daum that the Egyptian materials suggest that an indigenous Egyptian myth of royalty and competing forces (Horus versus Seth) has undergone a certain process of development (introduction of Osiris, followed by accumulation by Osiris of other gods' characteristics). This process seems to me to indicate an influence from the Semitic side coming after the formation of Egyptian royal ideology.

In this perspective one would see certain elements mentioned by Plutarch as coming from the Semitic field: the identification of Osiris with the moon, in parallel to 'Athtar, the sevenfold circling of a temple, as at the Ka'ba, and the use of human sacrifice. Since the last two are localised in specific parts of Egypt we have all the more reason to suspect that they reflect the coming into Egypt of Semitic-speaking peoples.

3
North Africa

In our survey of religion in North Africa we shall have occasion to consider two Semitic-speaking peoples, the Carthaginians and the Arabs. The main focus of our attention, however, will be the Berbers. No book-length study of Berber religion has yet been written. But there is an excellent encyclopaedia article on this subject, written just before the First World War, and other fine brief analyses were published in the 1980s.[1] To these I am greatly indebted, and will make constant use of them in what follows. My survey will follow a chronological order. First I will look at pre-historic rock caves, and then at the proto-historic funerary cult; next, at Herodotus and other evidence from antiquity, followed by the medieval Muslim sources; then at the Spanish writers who describe the indigenous religion of the Canary Islands; finally, at the modern anthropological studies of rites, folktales and spirit possession.

The Pre-Historic Rock-Carvings

The rock-carvings of the Upper Atlas mountains in Morocco, some of which are Neolithic, although most belong to the Bronze Age or the beginning of the Iron Age, show the indigenous character of the veneration accorded to mountains in North Africa, a veneration confirmed by classical authors. Neolithic carvings in the Atlas have attracted attention for their representations of rams with spheres on their heads.

Previously scholars thought that they reflected the Egyptian worship of Amun-Re, but now the dating of these carvings to a much earlier period has put an end to this line of interpretation. Gabriel Camps, the French scholar who is the acknowledged

leader of Berber studies, has pointed out that the rams cannot be said with any confidence to represent deities. Usually a worshipping man has his back to them: thus presumably he faces a god and is leading them as decorated, sacrificial victims (often found among Semitic-speaking peoples) and inscriptions show that in North Africa rams and lambs were sacrificed in antiquity.[2]

In 1990 the French archaeologist Georges Souville presented a paper on the Upper Atlas rock carvings to an international colloquium. He observed that in these carvings one finds a vast number of discs, often surrounded by dots or rays. Some would appear to be part of a cult of the sun – many face the south, which supports this hypothesis. A lot show male warriors who are being put to death. There are also male idols, sometimes with rectangular bodies. Camps objected that the discs were probably shields. Souville replied that many of them must indeed be shields, but the largest, decorated on the inside with curved lines, are probably representations of the sun.[3]

The Proto-Historic Funerary Cult

Passing from prehistory to early antiquity, there is a huge amount of archaeological evidence for a widespread funerary religion in ancient North Africa. Here again it is Camps who is the leading scholar: in 1961 he published a massive volume entitled *Monuments et rites funéraires protohistoriques*, which presents most useful conclusions. The architecture of the tombs shows that ceremonies would take place around them and sacrifices would be made long after the actual burials. Altars and chapels were attached to the tombs. In general, the dead seem to have been buried mostly facing the east, with the monuments also facing the direction of the rising sun, from which offerings would have been made. The monuments are sometimes decorated with solar discs, and are often accompanied by phallic stones – just as in the twentieth century wooden phallic symbols have been placed on rural graves in North Africa. All the architectural evidence indicates the flourishing practice of 'incubation', going to sleep at a holy spot in order to have a dream which will give good advice. This practice is attested for North Africa by Herodotus and continues there today. In the Sahara, among the Berber-speaking Tuareg people, wives lie down

on ancient tombs in order to obtain news of their absent husbands. Archaeological investigations suggest that buildings were constructed in such a way as to render 'incubation' easier.[4]

Herodotus

Herodotus' description of North Africa comes in Book IV of his *Histories*, which has been the subject of a recent commentary by the Italian classicist Aldo Corcella, published in 1993. The Greek historian's account of the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa (all of whom he calls 'Libyans') has been largely confirmed by modern anthropologists, and his sources seem to have been good ones. Whether he himself actually visited part of North Africa is not clear. He begins by describing the 'Libyans' who live closest to Egypt. These, he says, all show maidens that are about to be married to their king, who deflowers whoever pleases him. To the west are a people called the Nasamones, whose men are polygamous and share their wives: if a man is about to have intercourse with a woman he puts up a pole to give public notice of this. Whenever a man marries for the first time each male wedding guest has intercourse with the bride. The Nasamones swear oaths by their finest compatriots, touching their tombs. As regards divination, they sleep, after making vows, on their ancestors' tombs, and take as an oracle what they see in their dreams. Here Corcella observes that the custom of putting up a pole before a temporary union is paralleled among the ancient Arabs, while the practice of the bride having intercourse with all the male wedding guests is also found in antiquity on the Balearic islands. As for swearing oaths at the tombs of great men, this is still common in the Berber world, along with 'incubation', as we have seen.[5]

Further still to the west Herodotus mentions a people called the Gindanes, among whom the women wear leather anklets, one for each man with whom they have had intercourse: it is a point of honour to wear as many as possible. Beyond these are the Auseans, who have an annual festival in honour of a goddess identified by Herodotus with Athena. In the festival the maidens are divided into two teams, and fight with stones and staffs. If any are killed they are called 'false virgins'.

Before the fighting the most beautiful virgin is given a helmet

and drawn in a chariot along the shore. The Auseans say that Athena had Poseidon as her father, but became angry with him and gave herself to Zeus, who made her his daughter. Here men and women have intercourse promiscuously, without living together. Three months after a child is born it is judged to have as its father the man whom it most resembles. Cornella comments that the alleged polyandry of the Gindanes' women may reflect premarital practice alone. Berber women still wear anklets. As for the ritual fighting between the Ausean virgins, this was continuing in Libya around 1950. The supposed promiscuity of the Auseans may reflect polyandry.[6]

Later on Herodotus tells us that the nomads of North Africa sacrifice to only the sun and the moon. The Libyans all follow this practice but the Auseans and their neighbours sacrifice mainly to Athena, and after her to a local river called 'Triton' and to Poseidon. Cornella remarks that the cult of the sun and moon in North Africa is well attested over the millennia. 'Triton' and 'Poseidon' presumably represent local water-deities: the veneration of water is still widespread among the Berbers. The French archaeologist Véronique Brouquier-Reddé comments that here Herodotus' picture is too restrictive: other ancient authors show that in the Roman period the North Africans worshipped holy places, woods and stones, along with the wind.[7]

Carthaginian Child Sacrifice

At this point we must briefly leave our survey of ancient evidence for the study of indigenous North African religion, and consider the subject of Phoenician (in particular Carthaginian) child sacrifice. This has been discussed at length in a book by the American researcher Shelby Brown, published in 1991. Brown concentrates on the period from about 400 BCE to the destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE. It is clear that the Carthaginians, along with other Phoenicians, retained an archaic tradition of child sacrifice and practised it on an enormous scale. Children of up to four would be killed in the name of the gods. There is a large amount of archaeological (and in particular inscriptional) evidence concerning this. To some extent animals could be used as substitutes for the children. The victims would be buried in special

sacrificial cemeteries (the one at Carthage dates from around 750 BCE). Our archaeological materials are reflected in controversial references in the Bible to the sacrificing of children, and in Greek and Latin texts. The recipients of the sacrifices were Baal Hammon (identified with the Greek god Cronos and the Roman god Saturn) and the goddess Tanit. On the funerary monuments a number of motifs were carved: the most common of these have been interpreted in different ways by modern scholars. We may note in particular a crescent inverted over a disc. It is usual to interpret the crescent as a lunar symbol, while the disc has been seen as representing either the sun or the full moon. Sheep motifs are also found, and are considered to represent sacrificial victims.[8]

Further Ancient Textual Evidence

After Herodotus the ancient Greek and Latin authors do not tell us much about North African religion. Their brief references have been collected by twentieth-century researchers and are listed below.

The great Roman writer Cicero (106–43 BCE) presents the North African ruler Massinissa (reigned 203–148) as invoking the sun and 'the other divinities of the sky'.[9] His contemporary Diodorus of Sicily attributes the following myth to the inhabitants of the extreme north-west of Africa. Their first king was succeeded by one of his daughters, although he had many sons. She was like a mother to these, and was consequently called 'Great Mother'. Eventually she married one of her brothers and bore him two children, a boy called Helius ('the sun') and a girl called Selene ('the moon' – Diodorus, as a Greek, naturally sees the sun as masculine and the moon as feminine, whereas in Berber and other Afroasiatic languages it is the other way round). The queen's other brothers, inspired by jealousy, stabbed her husband to death and drowned Helius in a river, whereupon Selene threw herself down from a rooftop. 'Great Mother', looking for Helius' body along the river, had a vision in which she was told that her children would be turned into the sun and the moon. Subsequently she went mad and wandered around with her hair hanging loose, lamenting for her dead family. She disappeared in a storm, and her subjects duly venerated her and her celestial children.[10]

Nicolaus of Damascus, another Greek historian, who was born around 64 BCE, tells us that some Libyans had an annual festival after the setting of the Pleiades in the autumn: after the feasting they put the lights out and the men had intercourse with whichever women chance put beside them. (Camps says that such orgies are said to continue today in southern Morocco.)[11] Pomponius Mela, a Latin geographer who wrote around 40 CE, says that in Cyrenaica (north-east Libya) the inhabitants venerated a rock sacred to the south wind.[12] Pliny the Elder, a famous Roman writer on natural history, who was born in 23 or 24 CE and died in 79, tells us of the religious fear inspired by the Atlas Mountains and the spirits believed to dwell on them.[13] Apuleius, another famous Latin writer, who lived in Libya and wrote around 155 CE, gives us glimpses of his own religious practices when he attacks an atheist enemy: 'Even to the gods of country life, who give him food and clothing, he does not offer the first-fruits of his harvests, of his vines or his flocks; on his lands there is no sanctuary, no consecrated place or grove. And why do I have to talk about groves and sanctuaries? Those who have been in his domain say that they have not seen either an oiled stone or a garlanded branch.'[14] (Brouquier-Reddé compares Genesis 28: 16–22, in which Jacob pours oil on a pillar.)[15] Maximus of Tyre, a Greek philosopher who lived from around 125 to 185, relates that the 'western Libyans' venerate 'Mount Atlas' as both a temple and a god.[16]

The celebrated Christian theologian Tertullian, who was born at Carthage around 160 and died around 225, attacks the local gods as demons or worthless images of wood and stones. He (like other Christian writers) says that his fellow-countrymen worship their kings.[17] (Camps, surveying the epigraphic evidence, concludes that the ancient Berbers deified and worshipped their kings after they had died, but there is no proof of this happening while they were alive.)[18] Tertullian also tells us that the 'Afri' (the Berbers of the territory of Carthage) had as their chief goddess a virgin called Caelestis, while the 'Mauri' (a name first designating the inhabitants of Morocco, and then all the non-Romanised inhabitants of North Africa) had as theirs a mysterious figure called Varsutina.[19] Dio Cassius, a Roman historian who lived from around 150 to 235, narrates how a Roman army almost died of thirst in the Sahara, until a Berber ally persuaded its commander

to resort to incantations and magic, declaring that frequently huge amounts of water had been obtained in this way.[20] Arnobius, a teacher of rhetoric who converted to Christianity and lived from 260 to 327 at what is now Le Kef in north-west Tunisia, tells us how he used to worship before his conversion: 'Recently I used to venerate – o blindness! – images which had just come out of the oven, gods fabricated with hammers on anvils, bones of elephants, pictures, and garlands hung on ancient trees; if I ever caught sight of a stone lubricated and fouled by olive oil I used to worship it, and talk to it as if a power were present in it, and I would ask for favours from a tree-trunk devoid of feeling.'[21] Firmicus Maternus, of Syracuse in Sicily, a convert to Christianity who wrote between 334 and 337, says that some of the Afri give the air primacy over the other elements and consecrate it under the name of Juno or 'the virgin Venus'. This, as the French orientalist René Basset observed, is evidently a Phoenician cult.[22]

Our most famous indigenous source for the study of North African religion is the illustrious theologian Saint Augustine (354–430), Bishop of Hippo in what is now north-east Algeria. In his sermons Augustine reproached his flock for their habits of climbing mountains and entering underground caves in order to feel closer to God.[23] Augustine also condemned the women of his day for bathing nude on the day of the summer solstice (this rite continues today, with the purpose of producing rain, in Libya, Tunisia and Morocco).[24] His correspondence contains a couple of letters on the subject of worshippers of the old gods on the frontier of the Roman Empire in what is now Libya and Tunisia. These letters have been analysed by Brouquier-Reddé, who shows that the natives worshipped these gods at sacred groves, temples, wells and fountains, and in gardens, fields and public baths, with offerings of meat and cereals; they venerated water, the sun and the winds.[25]

Inscriptions

The most up-to-date survey of the inscriptional evidence for the study of the religion of the Berbers in antiquity has been made by Camps. As he observes, this evidence is not particularly informative. We know that a male god called Baccax was worshipped in

caves near Announa in north-east Algeria. Every year there would be a pilgrimage to these caves in the spring. (Today the guardian spirits of caves are still venerated in North Africa.) One inscription has a dedication to the moon-god, Ieru. A number of inscriptions mention minor local deities, such as a male personification of rain-water, Lilleu. The Romans called these deities the Dii Mauri ('the Moorish gods'). Their own god Saturn, identified with Baal Hammon and taking over from him, appears in the inscriptions as the supreme deity. Similarly the goddess Tanit gives way to the Roman Caelestis, almost always confused with Juno. The inscriptions confirm Tertullian's designation of Caelestis as a virgin, which is not surprising, since 'Tanit' is thought to mean 'the fiancée'.[26]

The Byzantine Evidence

More information comes in the Byzantine period. The Latin epic poet Corippus, who lived in the sixth century and was himself from North Africa, describes a Byzantine campaign against the 'Mauri' in 546–8. He mentions three indigenous deities: a bull-god called Gurzil, a war-god called Sinifere and an infernal deity called Mastiman to whom human sacrifices were offered. These deities were evidently worshipped in Tripolitania.[27]

Another source of the Byzantine period is the famous historian Procopius, who was born in Palestine c.500. He says that among the Mauri the women alone prophesy: some of them foretell the future as well as the great oracles of antiquity.[28]

Medieval Islamic Historians

The first Muslim writer to give us materials about Berber religion is the geographer Abu 'Ubayd al-Bakri of Cordova, who died in 1094 CE. He gives us the only concrete evidence of a cult of the ram in North Africa, attributing it to a tribe in the mountains of southern Morocco. Apparently this cult was thought so shameful that its adherents concealed their identity when visiting other tribes.[29] Al-Bakri confirms Corippus' testimony regarding the worship of Gurzil in Libya, and says that he was venerated in the form of a stone idol on a hill at Tripoli, to which sacrifices were

offered, along with prayers for the cure of people's illnesses and the increase of their riches.[30] He also tells us that one North African tribe, when preparing for a war, would sacrifice a black cow to devils known by the Arabic name of Shamarikh. The next morning they would wait until they saw a dust-storm, which they would take as a manifestation of the Shamarikh's coming to help. When entertaining guests they would put food aside for the Shamarikh. In all these matters they avoided mentioning God.[31]

Our second Muslim source is the celebrated North African philosopher, historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldun, who was born at Tunis in 1332 and died in 1406. Echoing Herodotus, he says that the Berbers worshipped the sun and the moon at the time of the Muslim conquest. He also tells us that the Berbers have an enormous number of folktales.[32] Ibn Khaldun confirms Procopius' evidence regarding the supposed prophetic powers of Berber women.[33]

The Canary Islands

Following the conquest by Spain of the Canary Islands at the beginning of the fifteenth century various writers described the religion and customs of the indigenous people called the Guanches, who spoke a language closely related to Berber. These writers have been subjected to varying degrees of criticism by modern scholars, but the information which they give often tallies with our sources for Berber religion and enhances our understanding of it.

The first of these writers is the Venetian traveller Alvise da Ca' da Mosto, who visited the Canaries in 1455. At that time some of the islands had not yet been taken by the Spanish, but information about the religion of their inhabitants was forthcoming from Christians whom they had captured and freed for ransom. Some were said to worship the sun, and others the moon and planets. Their 'lords' deflowered all maidens before marriage. When the 'lords' entered into office some men volunteered to die in honour of the ceremony, and, after fixed rituals, committed suicide.[34]

Among the remaining writers, the more important wrote in Spanish: Alonso de Espinosa, a Dominican whose work was completed between 1580 and 1590, Antonio de Viana, a native of

Tenerife who wrote in 1604 and Juan de Abreu de Galindo, a Franciscan who wrote in 1632. This group has been meticulously studied by the American scholar Ernest Hooton, who published his work in 1925. Here I shall summarise Hooton's survey of these Spanish sources as he considers one island after another.

On the island of Tenerife, Espinosa says that the people were divided into nobles, knights and peasants. God was supposed to have created some men and women from earth and water and given them flocks; then he created the peasants to serve them. In the rules of succession to the kingship the dead king would be succeeded by the eldest of any surviving brothers, even if he had sons. (Camps describes similar rules among the Berbers of the third century BCE.[35]) The 'lord' could not marry beneath himself, and so would sometimes marry his sister. Espinosa and Galindo give accounts of the embalming of the dead on Tenerife – the Canaries are famous for their mummies, which all belong to the upper classes. Hooton comments that, as among the ancient Egyptians, an incision would be made in the bodies of the more important or wealthier dead, in order to remove or treat the viscera.[36]

The inhabitants of the island of Gran Canaria, according to Galindo, were divided into nobles and commoners. They had a god called Acoran. The Gran Canarians also had religious women, who took part in processions at times of great calamity. These processions were made to two rocks, upon which milk and butter were poured: afterwards the inhabitants went to the sea-shore and struck the sea forcefully with rods. (Modern scholars have observed that this is clearly a rain-making rite.) Women were also prominent politically, and it appears that a man could become king by marrying the previous king's daughter. The king would exercise the 'right of the first night' on all maidens who were to be married. (This is paralleled in certain Berber and Arabic-speaking tribes in modern Morocco. However, Hooton thinks that the custom is so widespread as not to be 'ethnologically significant'.) There is some evidence that the Gran Canarians practised polyandry and female infanticide. Galindo tells us that the devil would appear to them in the form of an animal like a dog with long shaggy hair.[37]

Concerning another island, Gomera, we possess information

given by the Portuguese writer Gomes Eannes de Azurara in his *Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, which deals with events that happened approximately before 1448. He relates of Gomera's inhabitants: 'Their women were regarded almost as common property, for it was a breach of hospitality for a man not to offer his wife to a visitor by way of welcome. They made their sisters' sons their heirs.' Hooton comments that wife-lending is also so widespread as to have 'little ethnological significance', but that the system of matrilineal inheritance looks archaic.[38]

On the island of Hiero, according to Galindo, the inhabitants worshipped two deities, one male, called Eraoranzan and venerated by the men, and one female, called Moneyba and venerated by the women. They prayed to these when they wanted rain, and believed that the deities descended from heaven to two rocks. In winter, after a long dry season, if their prayers were not answered they fasted for three days, weeping and lamenting. (A fast of three days has also been observed, in conjunction with the conventional Islamic ritual for asking for rain, in Algeria.[39]) If this did not work they sent a holy man to a cave: then an animal like a pig would come to him and he would bring it to them. After this they would all walk round the two rocks with their flocks, and rain was produced.[40]

Galindo says that on the island of La Palma, in each of the twelve districts, there was a huge pillar or pyramid of stones. The inhabitants gathered round these on special occasions, and sang and danced around them; they also engaged in wrestling and gymnastic exercises. One district had instead a narrow rock about a hundred fathoms high, where the inhabitants worshipped a god called Idafe.[41] Finally, on the island of Lanzarote, we may note the practice of polyandry, witnessed by the two French chaplains who accompanied the original conquest at the start of the fifteenth century. Most of the women had three husbands, who took turns to live with them and wait upon them, replacing each other at monthly intervals.[42]

Leo Africanus

One exceptionally fine source for the study of North Africa was written in Italian by a former Muslim who, on being converted to

Christianity, was baptised under the name 'Leo' and is consequently called 'Leo Africanus'. Born at Granada between 1489 and 1495, he soon moved with his family to Morocco. Captured by Christians in 1518, he composed a long *Description of Africa*, which was published in 1550. In it he tells us of a town called 'The Spring of the Idols' near Sefrou in central Morocco, and provides the following explanation of its name: 'It is indeed related that, when the Africans were idolators, they had a temple near this town where men and women used to meet at nightfall at a certain time of the year. When they had finished their sacrifices they put the lights out and each man had intercourse with the woman whom chance had put near him. In the morning the women were all told not to go near their husbands for a year. The children whom they bore were brought up by the temple priests. There was in this temple a spring, which is still to be seen.'[13]

Twentieth-Century Sources

The twentieth-century sources for religion in North Africa are mainly French. They often show admirable familiarity with the region, its population and languages. Here we shall concentrate on rituals, myths or folktales, and spirit possession. As regards rituals we shall consider marriage, circumcision, rainmaking and annual festivals.

Marriage

In 1901 the French orientalist Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes published a brief survey of Algerian marriage-ceremonies. He found that among the Berber-speakers who lived around Bône in north-east Algeria the bridegroom would come in the night to the tent of the bride's family and kill a goat or sheep there. This was seen as a particularly awe-inspiring rite. Gaudefroy-Demombynes observed that among the Bedouin of Syria a similar sacrifice was made: as soon as the blood fell on the ground the marriage was seen as concluded. We may note that, as in Yemen, this performing of a ceremony by the groom at the bride's home is contrary to the now prevalent norm and looks archaic.[14]

1905 saw the publication of a remarkable study by another

French researcher, Auguste Mouliéras, describing an anti-Islamic tribe in southern Morocco, the Zkara. He found their religion to be a pure deism. The males were usually circumcised, but not always, the operation taking place between the ages of ten and fifteen. As regards marriage, we are told that on the evening of the wedding the bride was visited by one of the Zkara's spiritual directors. According to nearby Muslim informants this was in order to deflower her, but according to the Zkara themselves it was in order to interrogate her about her virginity (although, they conceded, the practice might reflect a long superseded exercising of the 'right of the first night'). The Zkara's Muslim neighbours also alleged that they engaged in an annual 'night of error', with promiscuous intercourse following the extinguishing of lamps.[15]

Biarnay: Berber spirits

A French customs-officer, Stéphane Biarnay, produced some fascinating evidence in 1908, in his study of the Berber dialect of Ouargla in central Algeria. He noted that on the first Wednesday of spring the boys of Ouargla would spend the day outside the town and return after dusk. It was believed that as they returned they were accompanied by the Imbarken, spirits who usually lived in the Sahara and controlled the winds. These spirits stayed for a week and were offered food – if the food were not offered they would produce a catastrophe. The people of Ouargla also venerated a female being called Tenunbia: at the end of the harvest the girls would make a doll out of two sticks forming a cross, and dress it as a woman. Then they would chant:

> O Tenunbia Tenunbia
> She has brought goodness
> The bride of our Prophet. May he be blessed

Biarnay compares the 'Mother of the Rain' (Umm al-Ghayth), who is represented in the same way by the Bedouin of Jordan, and sometimes called a bride. We may observe that dolls of this kind are used generally in North Africa and Jordan to invoke rain in times of need, and have been linked to a title given by Tertullian to Caelestis, Tanit's successor at Carthage: 'She who promises rain'.[16]

Westermarck: water-rituals, the carnival and circumcision

In 1926 the great Finnish social scientist Edward Westermarck published his monumental *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*. This contains a detailed enumeration of the rites of the Muslim calendar. Particularly noteworthy are the water-rituals of the first month, Muharram. On the tenth day water is distributed by way of charity and poured on graves. People splash each other with water and bathe. Westermarck observes that these rites are sometimes performed at midsummer instead, and thus appear to go back to the pre-Islamic past.[17] Equally archaic is the carnival which takes place at the Feast of the Sacrifice in the month of the Greater Pilgrimage. In this carnival or masquerade we find a man dressed up in goatskins or sheepskins, and consequently called Bujlud ('Dressed in Skins'), along with a man or boy dressed as a woman. Sometimes the latter is Bujlud's wife, but sometimes the woman is the wife of an old man called Shaykh al-Shuyukh ('The Oldest of the Old'). Among the Arabic-speaking mountaineers of northern Morocco, in one village we see Bujlud and the old man fighting over a 'young woman': Bujlud also dances indecently. In another village the woman is the old man's wife, and he accuses her of infidelity. Among Moroccan Berbers a similar masquerade takes place. Sometimes there is an obscene parody of Islamic worship. Westermarck thinks that this carnival reflects an ancient Roman influence, but may also contain survivals of prehistoric Berber religion. I am inclined to see, in the triad of old man, wife and young man, a reflection of the Semitic triad of old god, bride and young god.[18]

Westermarck also pays much attention to rain-making rites. He points out that in Morocco the failure of the crops is usually due to drought. To produce rain one tribe takes all its children to a shrine and lets them walk round it until they are tired. Another tribe walks round a mosque or shrine three times and sacrifices a sheep or goat. Animals sacrificed to produce rain are often black (notably cows), the idea being that they resemble rain-clouds. One tribe takes a black cow round a shrine seven times. Among the Berber-speakers it is common to parade a ladle, dressed up as a bride, when praying for rain. One tribe calls this ladle 'the bride of the rain' (rain being masculine in Berber). The custom is found

among Arabic-speaking Moroccans and Algerians as well. Another rain-making rite is a sort of game of hockey. In the Great Atlas men compete against women in a tug of war: then one man cuts the rope, so that the women fall and expose themselves. But both hockey and the tug of war can also be used to obtain dry weather.[49]

As regards circumcision, Westermarck tells us that the age at which boys are circumcised varies enormously. Some writers have said that this happens shortly after birth, but his own inquiries indicate that it is done much later, and they are confirmed by other sources, which give ages of twelve, thirteen or fourteen (especially in the countryside). Sometimes the boy is presented as a bridegroom and the ceremony resembles a wedding.[50]

Dermenghem: archaic sexual customs

An extremely valuable survey of popular religion in North Africa was produced by the French researcher Émile Dermenghem in 1954. He obtained particularly useful information about tribes with archaic customs in Algeria and Morocco. Dermenghem personally visited the Athawna subdivision of the Gherranema tribe in the Algerian Sahara. According to his informants the Athawna held the feast of the 'night of error', with promiscuous intercourse after the extinguishing of lights, in the dry bed of a wadi, in October. Apparently they also had a tradition of ritual defloration, to some extent performed by male spiritual directors, but mainly done by married women, using their fingers. Dermenghem also acquired further information about the Zkara, supplementing that obtained by Mouliéras and summarised above. Apparently the 'night of error' had been observed until about twenty years before. The Zkara had also recently abandoned the custom of fictitious marriages between poor women and babies of rich families (the women would be given sexual freedom, and their children would be attributed to their 'husbands'). They had allowed the 'right of the first night' to die out.[51]

Elsewhere, near Tarza in northern Morocco, Dermenghem concluded that a subdivision of the Ghiata tribe observed the 'night of error' in autumn, in a cave, with fifteen men and fifteen women having intercourse after wild dancing. In Mauritania he found that the Ghudf, a branch of the great international Muslim

mystical brotherhood of the Qadiris, engaged in promiscuous intercourse two or three times a year, on a moonless night, after a ceremony of 'remembrance of Allah'. He also found that wife-lending existed in various scattered places in North Africa. 'Sacred prostitution' also continued, among young women claiming descent from famous holy Muslims of the past: the daughters of certain tribes prostituted themselves, in a highly dignified manner and without encountering any disapproval, under the supervision of their mothers and aunts.[52]

Myths of Kabylia

Early in the twentieth century a number of myths were collected by the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius in the Berber-speaking region of Kabylia in northern Algeria. He published these in German in 1921. Doubts about their authenticity have been expressed by the French scholar Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, in her impressive book on Kabyle folktales, which appeared in 1970. She complains that Frobenius did not say precisely where he found these myths or from whom he recorded them. Nonetheless, she feels that they do correspond to some degree to other Kabyle materials and can be used for purposes of research. It is to be noted that nobody except Frobenius has found myths of humankind's origins in this area.[53]

The Kabyle myths tell us that in the beginning there were one man and one woman living beneath the earth. A light shining from the earth's surface revealed the difference between them, and they had intercourse. They had fifty sons and fifty daughters, who climbed through holes on to the earth above. The mother of these children, a sorceress, was responsible for the creation of sheep: she was called 'the first mother of the world'. She also caused the first eclipse of the sun, which required the death of a child in order to shine again. The older she got, the more wicked she became. She caused the first division of humankind into separate peoples. Then she created noxious animals: the porcupine and the tortoise. Eventually she was turned into stone. Previously this 'first mother' had created the sun and the moon by cutting out parts of the infected eyelids of an ox and a ram and throwing them respectively into a bowl of water and a fire.[54]

Another myth collected by Frobenius presents two brothers, to one of whom God grants that he should occupy himself with 'the work of the day', while the other is given 'the work of the night'. The former receives a ball of white wool and the latter one of black wool: they have to unravel these. In the end they rule as kings of the morning and the evening. Frobenius goes on to describe the Kabyles' colour-symbolism. Black represents 'behind', the west, death and war; white 'in front', east, light and an open future; green 'right', north, luck and happiness; yellow 'left', south, illness and weakness.[55]

Lacoste-Dujardin, commenting on Frobenius' materials, remarks that the opposition between the illuminated, fertile earth and the dark, sterile underworld often appears in Kabyle folktales. Similarly, the Moroccans, living to the west of the Kabyles, are seen as sinister and crafty magicians, who are bound to beat the Kabyles as 'men of the east'. The same sort of antitheses are found in food consumption: butter is linked to women, and oil and black bread to men. There are two cycles of food consumption in Kabylia, one in the dry season, in which bread is accompanied by oil, and one in the moist season, when boiled cereals are eaten with dairy products.[56]

Lacoste-Dujardin on Kabyle folklore

Lacoste-Dujardin's own study of Kabyle folktales is particularly relevant to our purposes. She begins by analysing the various versions of the story of Mqidesh ('Resourceful'), a hero who resembles the Tom Thumb of European folklore. He is very small, but makes up for this by his craftiness. After saving his brothers from an ogress he returns to deal with her on his own, brings about her death (either by fire or by ensuring that she is devoured by wild beasts), marries and becomes a king. This story to some extent resembles a Berber folktale from Morocco, in which a heroine and her brother are exposed in a forest. They meet an ogress, and burn her to death. However, this Moroccan tale is closer to that of *Hänsel and Gretel* (itself paralleled, as we have seen, in Yemen), whereas the Kabyle story of Mqidesh has a number of features specific to it alone.[57]

Also of interest is Lacoste-Dujardin's discussion of symbols of

virility. The most important of these is the adult male's weapon, which can be a sort of mace, sometimes made by a blacksmith. According to Frobenius the Kabyles had an ancient rite on their feast-days: a married man would plant his mace in the ground, and near it would be placed his share of the meat of the animal sacrificed by his village. Another symbol of virility is the lion, who also represents fertility: in the Kabyle carnivals the masqueraders cry out that the lion is about to arrive and room must be made for him. (Perhaps this is to be linked to the widespread symbolism of the lion in the cult of Saturn in North Africa.) Masculinity is also symbolised by a house's principal beam (upon which, after a boy's circumcision, the foreskin is hung), while femininity is symbolised by its central pillar. It is also represented by raw food, offered at a wedding by the family of the groom, as opposed to the cooked food given by the family of the bride.[58]

Lacoste-Dujardin finds that this relationship between the sexes is constantly reflected in the Kabyle folktales, the central concern always being fertility. She points to a tale called *'Ali and His Mother* as being particularly rich in details and existing in more variant versions than any other. In this story a father tells his seven sons to kill their respective mothers. One, 'Ali, refuses and leaves home with his mother. He meets a good ogress, who adopts him as her son. His natural mother meets an ogre and gives him 'Ali to eat. 'Ali's bones are used by the ogress to bring him back to life. Near a spring he meets a king's daughter, who has been offered to a seven-headed water-snake which is holding the water back. He kills the snake, marries the princess, goes on to kill the ogre and his mother and becomes king.[59]

Doutté: ritual and myth combined

A story of this kind was published in 1914 by the French scholar Edmond Doutté. As Dermenghem observes, it looks extremely archaic. Doutté heard it in the High Atlas mountains, at a holy cave near the town of Demnat. Both Muslims and Jews sacrificed chickens there, and women bathed in the nearby ponds in order to have children. A Muslim holy man is venerated in the cave, and has his festival on the fourth day after the Feast of the Sacrifice (i.e. at the full moon). In this festival a black bull is

killed. It is related that a seven-headed demon used to cut off the water of the stream there and kidnap all the girls. He was called the 'Ravisher of Brides' (a common title in North African folk-tales). After a time he agreed to accept one girl a year. Eventually it was the turn of the king's daughter. A hero came and, after discovering that one had to kill the demon with the latter's own sword, did so.[60]

Welte: spirit possession

In 1990 the German scholar Frank Maurice Welte published a magnificent study of spirit possession in Morocco. He concentrated on the socially despised brotherhood of the Gnawa, which consists of the descendants of black slaves from Mali. The male members of the Gnawa are usually musicians and acrobats, who consume a lot of cannabis and wine; the female members tend to be prostitutes. Some of these women become 'seeresses' (*shuwafas*), and provide information about spirits thought to be responsible for illnesses. The few male members of the brotherhood who are not musicians tend to be transvestites and homosexuals or bisexuals: they can become 'seers' (*shuwafs*). It is, however, the activity of the seeresses which is most prominent. They have many women clients, who come and tell them about their problems. The seeress will then inhale some incense, go into a light trance and learn from the spirits what has happened, before giving the client advice. If the client is found to be possessed the seeress will practise a form of 'incubation' in her own home during the following night. She puts aloeswood and milk on a tray on her bed, in order to attract the relevant spirits to come and give her the necessary indications in a dream.[61]

The Gnawa usually meet in a nocturnal gathering called by the Islamic mystical term of 'presence' (*hadra*), which for them means the presence of the spirits. There is a type called the 'small presence', with forty to fifty people involved. A ram is sacrificed and a seeress drinks a few drops of its blood. She goes into a trance and gives her prophecies to the women taking part. Dancing follows, and then feasting. Afterwards incense is burnt and music played, with songs corresponding to the spirits by whom the participants are possessed. In the 'great presence' 100 to 150

people take part, and a black calf is sacrificed. Traditionally this is done in the month of Sha'ban. Another sort of 'presence' is arranged to cure an illness. Chickens, a ram and a he-goat are sacrificed and the patient listens to a dialogue between the seeress and one of the brotherhood's leaders: the seeress acts as the medium of the spirit which has caused the illness.[62]

Besides the 'great presence' there are other invocations of the spirits in Sha'ban (the most important month for the Gnawa). One ritual exists in two forms: a small annual ritual and a larger ritual performed every four years. This is done at the full moon, and at a spring believed to be haunted. In the annual version a black he-goat is sacrificed, while in the other the victims are, in addition to 40 chickens, a black he-goat, a ram and a ewe: these three animals correspond respectively to the doorkeeper of the realm of demons, to Sidi Hammu, the spirit of blood' (who is naturally represented by the colour red) and to the latter's sister.[63]

The Gnawa also have a ritual in the month of Rabi' I, at the time of Muhammad's birthday, which falls on the twelfth day. For the Gnawa the celebrations last from the 12–15 Rabi'. On the 16 Rabi' (i.e. at the full moon) they go from the city of Meknes to the nearby shrine of the Muslim holy man Sidi 'Ali ibn Hamdush (d.c.1720). Here there is a valley sacred to a figure called 'Lady 'A'isha', and in it are situated a holy pond and a great and ancient fig-tree. The grave of Sidi 'Ali lies above a large spring. After music and dancing a procession makes its way through the valley: here, for the Gnawa, the ecstatic veneration of 'Lady 'A'isha' is the most important part of the festival.[64]

Servier and Bourdieu: dualism and fertility in Berber religion

In 1962 the French Algerian anthropologist Jean Servier published the results of his fieldwork, conducted in the 1950s, on the farming year among Berber speakers. Later, in 1990, he provided a brief summary of the outcome of his research. Servier insists on the Mediterranean character of Berber thinking: the dead and the living are inextricably bound up with each other. Thus life-cycle and agrarian rituals try to associate the dead with life on earth, and the tombs of North Africa have remained the constant centres of religious activity. The dead grant fertility to the living in return

for sacrifices. Moreover, Berber thinking, like Berber practice, is dualistic. A person has two souls, one vegetative (the *nafs*), coming from the mother, the other a 'subtle' soul (the *ruh*), coming from God. (It must be observed that here the terminology is Arabic and Islamic.) Consequently, a mother resembles the earth, since it is to God that the grain sown in the earth owes its fertilising power. The Kabyles say that man is light and woman darkness, but night is necessary for the light to come into play. Social organisation is also dualistic: a tribe is divided into two halves or 'moieties', and so is a village. The Berbers use the image of the two slopes of a roof to represent the resulting complementarity. In a Kabyle village there is a 'high' moiety, seen as male and 'dry', and a 'low' moiety which includes artisans and immigrants and is viewed as dark and 'wet'.[65]

Servier's work on the farming year has been analysed and criticised by the leading Parisian sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who also did fieldwork in Algeria (in the late 1950s and early 1960s) and added the results of his own investigations. Bourdieu objects that Servier, by concentrating on the opposition of life and death, fails to find the 'practical logic' which links rituals to everyday life and agrarian activity. He confesses that he himself, in 1963, had produced a similarly limited survey of the pairs of opposing elements to be found in the Kabyle house. Here Bourdieu had remained within the 'structuralist' perspective fashionable in the 1960s, seeing everything in terms of binary oppositions. Thus the Kabyle house was analysed in terms of its division into two parts, one for humans, the other mainly for animals. The latter was sombre, humid, inferior and reserved for natural activities, whereas the former was full of light, noble and reserved for cultural activities. Moreover, these oppositions corresponded to that of the female and the male, and that between the home itself, as the world of woman, and life outside, as the world of man. Consequently, the main door faced east, towards brightness and prosperity.[66]

More recently Bourdieu has provided fresh analyses of Kabyle customs in terms of his concept of 'practical logic': the binary oppositions do not, he says, constitute a system of values, but are seen by the Kabyles as belonging to efficacious actions. So a man stands nobly upright in order to knock olives off a tree and a

woman stoops humbly in order to pick them up. Such practical interests have to be borne in mind when considering the various calendars used by the Kabyles. Usually they see the year as beginning in autumn, about 15 August (when the wet season begins) or on 1 September in the Julian calendar (which the Berbers have preserved). However, sometimes the Kabyles see the 'practical' start of the year as the first day of ploughing, in October. Then oxen are sacrificed in a rain-making rite. (According to Servier they are black or grey, and before being sacrificed are led round a holy tomb seven times in an anti-clockwise direction – the Kabyles say 'the direction of the stars'. Previously they were struck in the back of the neck with an axe: now they have their throats slit, as Islamic law demands, facing east.[67]) The wet season ends at different times depending on the region, from March to the start of May. Now the opposition between the dry and the wet finds its 'practical' significance in men's activities of sacrificing, ploughing and harvesting, which are acts of violence, as opposed to women's work – looking after children and gardens, gestation and giving birth, mirroring the germination and emergence of the cereals. (Thus food eaten in summer is more 'male', in being drier, whereas food eaten in winter is more 'female', as being more liquid.) When life reappears on the earth there is the ritual of 'the separation from January', and in this a boy, aged between six and ten, has his hair cut for the first time: he makes the transition from being female to being male. (Previously the weight of the hair in money would be used for buying meat.)[68]

Bourdieu's work also contains other useful pieces of evidence. We are told of a form of human sacrifice during a prolonged drought: an old and pious man is prepared for burial and laid in a mosque, facing east, before going home to die, presumably of hunger and thirst. A ritual murder is also committed upon the last sheaf of a harvested field: the 'master of the field' faces east and 'kills' the sheaf, identified with the 'spirit of the field', with a simulated cutting of its throat, giving it various exhortations to expect resurrection, such as 'Die, die, our field of barley! Glory to him who does not die! Our Lord will restore life to you after death.' Here, then is a 'dying god' who is also a 'rising' one. Also of interest is the linking of male circumcision to the ploughing ceremonies: the newly circumcised boys, now brought into the

world of men, are surrounded by men sitting on ploughshares and holding rifles. Bourdieu points out that the opposite of this world of social unity is symbolised by the jackal, an outlaw believed to engage in irregular sexuality, having intercourse with the camel. The jackal is seen as resembling old women, and is twisted, full of insatiable desire and a source of disorder and decision. He is also compared to a beardless red-headed man – altogether an apt homologue of the sinister Seth! Bourdieu also makes the valuable observation that Kabyles are opposed to each other in successive generations (fathers against sons) and united in alternate generations (grandfathers with grandsons): thus when possible a man gives his first son the name of his own father. This generation-pattern is typical of the Afroasiatic domain. Finally, we may observe that in Bourdieu's view rain, paradoxically, is 'dry' and male, personified as the masculine figure Anzar: accordingly when, in the ritual tug of war, the rope is cut and the women fall on their backs, they invite the rain to fertilise them.[69]

Afroasiatic Elements in North African Religion and Society

A number of elements noted in this chapter are paralleled in Daum's Semitic materials and in Egypt. Holy mountains, the worship of the sun and the moon, the veneration of stones and the attention given to water are just a few. The sacrificing of children, with the possibility of animals being substituted, is notably Semitic. As regards the myth transmitted by Diodorus of Sicily about the 'Great Mother', her bereavement and her consequent distraught searching, this closely resembles the myth of Isis and Osiris. Other elements in the ancient evidence are familiar enough: nudity for the sake of rain-making we have already encountered in Arabia, and the male rain-water-deity Lilleu sounds like similar Semitic figures. The Byzantine evidence is not so clear. Here the war-god Sinifere, who is also found in inscriptions, may correspond to 'Athtar.[70] Gurzil, as a bull-god, may correspond to the 'black god' of the Semitic field, while the infernal Mastiman may be a duplicate of Gurzil: 'splitting' of one god into two or more is a widespread phenomenon in the history

of religions.[71] The devils called 'Shamarikh' who appear as dust-storms in the medieval Islamic evidence may well reflect a further instance of 'splitting' of this kind.

As for the materials from the Canary Islands, they certainly present extremely archaic practices. Human sacrifices at the accession of new kings are paralleled, as we shall see, in Ethiopia. Royal marriage between brother and sister is well-evidenced in Egypt, as is succession to the throne through marriage to the previous king's daughter. The practice of making incisions in the bodies of the richer dead before mummification is also Egyptian. The veneration of pairs of rocks looks typically Afroasiatic.

Biarnay's evidence about the Imbarken, spirits who live in the Sahara and would produce a catastrophe if not propitiated, suggests that they may be duplicates of the diabolical Shamarikh. The 'bride' of the Prophet Muhammad invoked at Ouargla in order to produce rain is closely paralleled by the imaginary bride offered to Hud in Yemen. In the same way, in Westermarck's materials, the carnival-figure Bujlud, 'Dressed in Skins', resembles the Yemeni figure 'Donkey's Skin'. In between an old man and a woman, he echoes the Yemeni triad of old god, young hero and bride. Taking a black cow round a shrine seven times in order to produce rain closely resembles a practice which we found in Egypt but thought in that case to have reflected an influx of Semitic speakers. Circumcision, we may note, is done long after birth, as in ancient Egypt and Arabia. Dermenghem's evidence about the 'night of error' is extremely significant: we learn that this used to take place in the dry bed of a wadi, in October. This evidently corresponds to the beginning of ploughing and demand for rain at this time, and thus to the Semitic autumn festivals.

The myths and folktales presented by Frobenius, Lacoste-Dujardin and Doutté also reflect what we have found elsewhere. Frobenius' 'first mother' resembles Diodorus' 'Great Mother' in that they both give humankind the sun and the moon. Lacoste-Dujardin and Doutté both give us stories of a young hero who kills an ogre or demon and thereby liberates water as well as a princess – Doutté's version is linked to the sacrificing of a black bull at the full moon, so that the correspondence with Daum's Semitic materials is particularly close.

Welte's study of the Gnawa is exceptionally useful for the

comparatist. Here we see plenty of continuity from the ancient past in the activities of the Gnawa's prophetesses and their use of 'incubation'. Significant too, in making comparisons with the Yemeni side, is the importance given to the month of Sha'ban. As for the sacrificing of a black he-goat to the doorkeeper of the realm of demons, a ram to the male 'spirit of blood' and a ewe to the latter's sister, the obvious parallel is again the Arabian triad of 'black god', young warrior-god and goddess. Westermarck has argued that the name of the 'spirit of blood', Sidi Hammu, suggests that of Baal Hammon, while the female figure associated with him would appear to represent Ishtar: this would seem to be the result of Phoenician colonisation of the Moroccan coast.[72]

Finally, we may note more Afroasiatic elements in Servier and Bourdieu's work: the male-female dualism; the division of the house into two parts (paralleled in Egypt, and, as we shall see, in Ethiopia); the 'practical logic' of the Kabyles, typical of the ancient Egyptians, a pre-eminently practical people who never showed any interest in developing philosophy; the sacrifice of the black oxen, led round a tomb seven times, anticlockwise (like the sevenfold anticlockwise circlings in Arabia), and in particular the killing of the animals with a blow to the back of the neck, as in southern Arabia; the weighing of the child's hair, as in Egypt and the Semitic field; the human sacrifice; the dying and resurrection of the 'spirit of the field'; the symbol of disorder (the jackal, resembling Seth); the opposition between fathers and sons (which we shall find among the Hausa and in Ethiopia); and, lastly, the personification of rain-water as a male figure (Anzar).

4
The Hausa

Our survey of the Hausa of West Africa will begin with an examination of fieldwork done in the early twentieth century. This will also include consideration of the Hausa's famous spirit possession cult, as studied among Hausa communities established in North Africa, in Libya and Tunisia. Then we shall go on to look at an ethnographic field study of non-Muslim Hausa in northern Nigeria, done in the 1930s. After this we shall make use of the autobiography of a Muslim Hausa woman, also of northern Nigeria, recorded in 1949–50, with reference to her account of marriage-customs. Our main sources, however, will be long French anthropological presentations of the Hausa of southern Niger, published in the 1970s. Finally, we shall again make comparisons with materials examined in earlier chapters, and we shall endeavour to isolate the Afroasiatic logic of Hausa religion.

The Hausa of Nigeria in 1913

The first extended study of Hausa myths and customs appeared in 1913, produced by a British army officer, Arthur Tremearne, and entitled *Hausa Superstitions and Customs.* Tremearne had a good knowledge of anthropology and received advice from Frazer and Westermarck. He presented 100 folktales which he collected in what was then called the Nassarawa province of Northern Nigeria, somewhat to the south of the main Hausa heartlands. These folktales, he remarks, often resemble European ones. Tremearne also notes that occasionally, in contrast to the usual Hausa system of patrilineal descent, the tales suggest that matriliny may once have existed. Thus a king who makes his four wives pregnant says that each should return to her mother's house for the birth. In

some other tales, as in Yemen, a hero comes and rules over a kingdom after marrying the king's daughter.[1]

Tremearne provides useful information about the sacrifice of a black ox in some Hausa provinces, when a new chief was elected (this practice was obsolete in his time). The chief would lie on a bed, and the ox would be killed in such a way that the blood ran over him. Then the ox's hide was used to enclose the previous chief's dead body before its burial. The new chief would live in his mother's house for a week before a ceremonial procession to his palace. Tremearne comments that a black ox appears to be linked to death and disaster: the old English expression 'The black ox has trod on his foot' means that misfortune has befallen a man.[2]

In his analysis of Hausa religion Tremearne observes that the folktales and the spirit possession cult show that various gods had been worshipped in the past, before Islam had taken over. The Hausa would venerate posts set up in the fields and the spirits of wells and trees. He lists some of the gods or spirits which still receive sacrifices from non-Muslim Hausa. There is Kure, a male deity to whom a red he-goat is immolated, but who eats humans. Uwardowa, 'Forest-Mother', presides over hunting and receives offerings of a red she-goat or cock. By contrast, Uwargona, 'Farm-Mother', is the goddess of agriculture, and likes white victims. There is also a male water-spirit called Sarkin Rafi, 'King of the River', whom Tremearne is tempted to identify with the sinister monster Dodo, discussed below. I am inclined to see this spirit as usually representing fertilising water itself, and Dodo as a god of its violent production. There is another deity which symbolises both rain and storms, Gajimare, whose name can mean both 'Storm-clouds' and 'Rainbow': the deity has the form of a snake and is partly male and red and partly female and blue. It lives not just in the storm-clouds, but in all watering-places, and is sometimes presented as Uwardowa's husband and Kure's father.[3]

Tremearne's presentation of Hausa myths yields us the familiar Afroasiatic picture of a female sun and a male moon. We are told that they quarrelled when the sun gave birth to a daughter and gave her to the moon to hold. The baby was too hot for the moon to do so, and fell to the earth, thus causing the heat which humans feel and the sun's constant and angry pursuit of the moon.[4]

As for the monster Dodo himself, Tremearne is somewhat uncertain about him, and unsure as to whether he is necessarily identical with a water-snake. In one story such a snake stops people from drawing water from a well: a youth comes, kills it, marries the local princess and becomes chief of the country. 'Dodo' has also been taken to indicate any great wild beast. Tremearne says that in some tales he is clearly a water-god, but in others he lives in the forest and cannot cross a stream. He is a giant, eats humans and, as in the water-snake story, is killed by a hero. Dodo appears in one particularly important tale. In this a king promises to give one of his daughters in marriage to the son of Dodo (who here is a river-god) in return for helping to bring a war to a victorious conclusion. Later the river rises and threatens the king's city, reminding him of the promise. The daughter is duly delivered up. Another tale has a chief's daughter sacrificed to Dodo every year in order to ensure an abundant supply of water until Dodo (in the form of a snake) is killed by a hero. Further examples, according to Tremearne, indicate that Dodo and a female witch are frequently interchangeable.[5]

Spirit Possession among the Hausa of North Africa

In 1914 Tremearne published a second book, *The Ban of the Bori*, 'ban' here meaning 'cult' and *bori* a spirit by whom someone is possessed. He had studied this cult in the Hausa communities (consisting mainly of former slaves) of Tunis and Tripoli. Tremearne begins his account by explaining that a Hausa, along with his soul, possesses a *bori* of the same sex, which is a sort of second soul, acting as an intermediary with other spirits. Usually a Hausa acquires another *bori*, of the opposite sex, on reaching puberty: this has to be consulted when preparations are made for marriage, in which it will be ousted by the human spouse. In addition there exists a whole world of spirits, also called *boris*, and generally malevolent. These may be adapted versions of Muslim holy men, Semitic genies, ancestors or ancient Hausa deities. One propitiates these spirits – seen as causing illnesses – with sacrifices and rituals in which some worshippers are possessed or 'ridden' by them.[6]

According to Tremearne the members of a Hausa clan have a totem, some animal, fish or bird which they never eat and do not

usually kill, the exception being at an annual harvest-time ritual. The totem is inherited from their father. One informant's totem was, for example, the red-legged hornbill, and a species of tree associated with it (called the *kiriya*) was thus also sacred for him. Sacrifices were offered to both bird and tree in the annual rite. A black cloth and a white one were wrapped round a tree of this species, and at mid-day on the first day of the festival a black bull was killed and its blood poured into the tree's roots. The bull's hide was worn in turn by five priests, who danced around the tree. A second bull was sacrificed on the fourth day and a he-goat on the seventh, this time at midnight. A young bird was also taken from its nest and killed.[7]

Tremearne's informants in North Africa told him of an old Hausa ritual in which about six boys and six girls were shut up in a large house for a month before the harvest. They were given instruction in the veneration of their totem and the *bori* cult. In one part of the Hausa homeland these initiates were not allowed to have intercourse with one another, but elsewhere the opposite was the case: Tremearne quotes evidence that any girls found to be pregnant at the end of the month were declared to be the wives of their partners during this period.(In this area sacrifices were made in front of a pole as part of the ritual.)[8]

We also hear, again from an informant living in North Africa, of rites employed by relatively non-Islamised Hausa in Nigeria to cause and stop rain. To cause rain nine rain-makers would take clubs to a tamarind or rubber-tree near the town gate and kill a black bull, making the blood go into the tree's roots. They then drank beer, and the eldest, wearing the bull's hide, called on the others to ask Allah for water. The others did so, adding that if no rain came they would kill the old man, and threatening the deity with their clubs. To stop the rain the youngest of them would be told to say, 'O Allah, stop making water, o one with the big stomach, that is enough!'[9]

Tremearne tells us of a very evil spirit called Magiro, 'He with the Eyebrows', who tends to insist on human victims. One can summon him and try promising a bull or a he-goat in exchange for some important object of desire, but if he insists on a human and one agrees to this then the designated victim will slowly wither away. Magiro is the chief of the city in which the *boris* live

and has absolute power over them. Tremearne also gives us more information about Sarkin Rafi, the principal spirit of rivers and lakes. As a source of fertility he is a great farmer. Although he is the patron of the rain-makers he cannot actually make the rain come, but has to ask Allah to do this. He is presented as one of the 'Muslim' spirits, as opposed to the 'black' spirits assigned to the pre-Muslim past. The chief of the latter (excluding Magiro, who though belonging to this sub-class is placed at the head of all the spirits) is Mai-Ja-Chikki, 'The Drawer-along of the Stomach' – the snake. After him comes Kure, who has responsibility for sports and in particular boxing, and then one of his wives, Doguwa.[10]

Nigerian Non-Muslim Hausa in the 1930s

In 1938–39 the American researcher Joseph Greenberg (later famous as a linguist and inventor of the term 'Afroasiatic') conducted investigations into the Hausa of the city of Kano in northern Nigeria and the surrounding rural areas. Some of these investigations concerned the non-Muslim Hausa. The latter, says Greenberg, have absorbed many Islamic elements of belief, and accept Allah as the Supreme Being. However, they have no rites connected with him, apart from asking for rain. Instead, they worship spirits, called *iskoki*, the plural of *iska*, which literally means 'wind'. The term *bori* encountered above can be used in the same way, but is employed essentially in the context of spirit possession. Greenberg thinks that the division of spirits into white and black and Muslim and non-Muslim is confusing, because it has been superimposed on the original division between spirits of the town and spirits of the bush. The Hausa idea of the spirits has many counterparts among other peoples of West Africa.[11]

Greenberg's list of these spirits is particularly informative. Their ruler is Sarkin Aljan, 'King of the Genies'. He is black, causes headaches and has a bull sacrificed to him. Now, among the rural Hausa around Kano, a cow or bull's head is offered; in the city itself, before the accelerated Islamisation imposed there after the conquest by the Fulani people in 1807, he received human victims. Also worshipped is a goddess called Inna, 'Mother': she is identified with Uwargona, the goddess of agriculture, and is seen as the

mother of all spirits. The illness which she produces is a swelling of the stomach, and her sacrificial victims are a white chicken and a white ewe. There is also a god called Bagiro, who devours souls. Here he is of little importance, but in other regions he seems to have the same place as Sarkin Aljan at Kano, and is called Magiro (as we have seen above). Many northern Nigerian tribes accord him great veneration. Only witches know what sacrifices are made to Bagiro. We also encounter Gajimare, who takes the form of a snake, lives in wells and appears as a rainbow: he is a Hausa version of the widely-attested West African rainbow-serpent. He causes stomach trouble and has a sheep with a black navel sacrificed to him. Kure reappears also: Greenberg explains that his name means 'male hyena'. He traps people's souls and gives them headaches: his offering is a red cock or red he-goat. His wife's name, Doguwa, 'The Long One', means 'possessing a long vagina'. The mother of all the forest spirits, she causes paralysis and receives a red childless she-goat. Sarkin Rafi makes one ill through dampness, and is given a black cock with white patches. Dodo, also a water-spirit, catches and eats humans. No illness is associated with him, and it is not known what, if any, sacrifice he receives. Greenberg notes that this region has a semi-desert environment, without large bodies of water: consequently not much attention is given to water-spirits, and it is not easy to find out much about them.[12]

After listing these and many other spirits Greenberg elaborates on the more important among them. Inna, he observes, is also called Uwargari, 'Mother of the City', and is thus opposed to the 'Mother of the Forest' (one of Doguwa's names) in the usual town-forest opposition, the town being good and the forest bad. Gajimare makes the rain stop, rising into the sky as a red light: afterwards he becomes the red part of a rainbow, while his wife Ra, who sends thunder and lightning, becomes its blue part. He is seen as extremely evil: as he is a black spirit, someone who is going to be possessed by him has a black cloth over his head. Kure is the most popular spirit of the non-Muslim Hausa and, as in Tremearne's sources, particularly associated with their national sport, boxing.[13]

These spirits receive their most important sacrifices from heads of families, mainly at the start of the agricultural season (this

period is called *bazara*, the hot time just before the rains begin) and at the harvest. Black spirits are given their offerings at night, white spirits by day. It appears that before the Fulani conquest the Hausa kings of Kano made public sacrifices at a 'gate of water', at a well sacred to Gajimare and at 'the grove of black water'. These were performed when thought advisable, for example during a drought or a war which was going badly. The most important offerings were those of black animals, immolated to the 'King of the Genies' and including a bull. One source relates that this spirit was given a human sacrifice every ten or fifteen years. A very dark-skinned youth (not a slave) would be kidnapped and then killed by the king in person.[14]

Individuals will also sacrifice to the spirits for personal reasons. Sometimes people will make sacrifices to the spirits of the bush inside their own homes, usually in order to use these spirits against their enemies: this is called 'keeping a *dodo* (evil spirit) in the house'. Thus if one is not intending to harm one's enemies it is wiser to sacrifice outside one's home.[15]

Greenberg also gives a useful explanation of the role of Gajimare. Elsewhere in West Africa it is believed that a similar serpent-deity lives in the ground. When it comes up it drives the water into the sky, which later falls in the form of rain. Consequently as a rainbow the serpent-deity is a portent of heavy showers. This solves the apparent problem of the name 'Gajimare' meaning both 'rainbow' and 'storm-clouds'. (The ancient Greeks also saw the rainbow as presaging misfortune and storms.) Greenberg observes that Ra, the thunder-goddess, is probably the result of a development peculiar to Kano, as she is not found elsewhere.[16]

Hausa Marriage-Customs

An invaluable account of Hausa marriage-customs was recorded in 1949–50 by the British anthropologist Mary Smith. She took down a whole autobiography at the dictation of a Hausa woman, Baba, in the province of Zaria in northern Nigeria. This autobiography contains an account of Baba's first marriage, which took place around 1904.

Some days before the wedding-day there is a ceremony of 'catching' the bride and rubbing her skin with henna. This is

done by her family, and in particular by a 'grandmother', who may or may not be one of her real grandmothers. The bride is told that this is going to happen by her special girl-friends (*kawaye*), and runs away and hides in the home of one of them. Then the 'grandmother' follows and catches her, only to be hit by the girls, who run off. Hiding and pursuit continue all day, and in the night the 'grandmother' eventually captures the bride in one of the 'compounds', the collective homes of Hausa extended families, which consist of enclosures, each containing a number of huts. There the old woman rubs a bit of henna on the bride's skin; then the 'grandmother' herself runs away. The friends all fall on top of the bride, crying, and cover her up. After this the bride's 'mothers' (adult women of her family) arrive and tell them to calm down and summon a drummer. There is an interval between this and the wedding-feast, four days for free people, two in the case of slaves.[17]

In the morning following the first application of henna the 'grandmother' washes the bride all over with warm water. The bride's chief girl-friend completely covers her head and face with a large cloth, and leads her by the hand to the compound of one of the 'mothers'- normally the bride's mother's younger sister. They are part of a procession. The bride cries and her friends sing to her that her dancing-days with them are over. She duly arrives at the hut of the *mawankiya*, the 'mother' who will supervise the further washing, which is actually performed by more than one 'grandmother'. After the evening meal the 'grandmother' who acted before comes to apply more henna. The *mawankiya* brings the bride out of the hut and the girl-friends seize her as she struggles. As the 'grandmother' puts the henna on the girl-friends sing to a bird called the *hankaka* (the pied crow):

> Save my life *hankaka* Save my life
> *Bazara* (the time just before the rains) has come
> *Hankaka* with the white breast
> White-breasted one Marriage has come

The groom's friends and younger brother come and help to hold the bride. She remains in the *mawankiya's* compound for four nights, and the latter applies henna to her every day. Then comes the wedding-day. The bride is washed, ideally by her maternal

grandmother, and the *mawankiya* takes her back to her father's compound. Before setting off the bride puts a cloth over her head and her chief girl-friend leads her away.[18]

At the bride's father's compound her family and that of the groom are waiting. (Smith's husband and co-worker, Michael Smith, explains in a note that among the Hausa the Islamic rite of marriage, which is simply a confirmation of the agreement to marry, is performed on the morning of the wedding-day, before the bride leaves her home and without the presence of the spouses.) The bride is washed by her 'grandmothers', her head being covered by a cloak, while her girl-friends try to get in the way. Then the *mawankiya* dresses the bride and her father entrusts her to the groom's younger brother and friends. They take her in procession to the groom's home, while her girl-friends again try to obstruct and sing:

> The great hunt was a good hunt
> The great hunt brought meat ...
> Ten hares ten ground squirrels
> Ten buffaloes ten gazelles
> Ten elephants ten antelopes
> And ten hyenas ...

The bride is brought to the groom's compound and the hut in which she will live. Her girl-friends try to stop her entering the hut and call for the groom's younger sister to be brought with water. They sing:

> We'll drink from the river
> Bring the bridegroom's water
> Bring water with a threepence

The groom's sister comes quickly with a vessel of water, which also contains a threepenny coin. She places it at the entrance to the hut and runs off. The girl-friends try to catch her and throw the water over her. If she fails to arrive quickly the bride and the girl-friends run towards the river. Eventually the bride is brought into the hut. Her 'grandmothers' wash and dress her again. Wedding-presents are brought, and the bride's 'mothers' dance with her in turn, putting her on their backs and again covering her head with a big cloth. In the afternoon the feast comes to an end.[19]

The Hausa of Southern Niger in the 1960s

In 1975 the French social scientist Guy Nicolas published a massive volume entitled *Dynamique sociale et appréhension du monde au sein d'une société Hausa*. This represents the result of many years of work done during the 1960s in the Maradi valley in southern Niger. The area in question is situated in between the Saharan desert to the north and the African bush to the south. Rain falls from May to November, allowing agriculture to be pursued, but is unreliable, so that the population is always afraid of drought. Apart from this rainy season there is a cool season from November to March and a hot season from March to May. When the rain comes it does so in violent storms. The wells of the area are also unreliable, but the river of the Maradi valley, which flows in the rainy season, produces lakes which last until the rain comes again. Traditionally the local population is divided into 'Masters of Farming' and 'Hunters'. According to a myth already briefly summarised above from Tremearne, a hero coming from the east killed a snake and married the queen or princess of the city of Daura. They had seven sons, who carved up the Daura Empire between them: seven Hausa states or kingdoms resulted, and the Maradi valley was divided between two of these, called Katsina and Gobir.[20]

Nowadays the inhabitants of the valley consist of adherents of the ancient Hausa traditions, who are called Anna (singular Anne), on the one hand, and more Islamised Hausa on the other. This division is explained by some variants of the myth just mentioned, according to which only six states were produced, and the eldest of the seven brothers, instead of getting an individual kingdom like the rest, was given an overall command over the indigenous populations, who were now dominated by the dynasties descended from the queen and the foreign hero. Thus the Anna would appear to represent the indigenous traditions, while the 'dynastic' Hausa have been more prone to Islamisation.[21]

The Anna, Nicolas observes, live their lives in patrilineal clans. Each clan is led by an 'inheritor', who is the guardian of its collective 'inheritance', such as farming or hunting – there are also clans of blacksmiths and 'masters of water'. Each clan has a totem, and also, planted in the ground in the inheritor's

compound, a special tree-branch, next to which sacrifices are made. In spite of the patrilineal character of this system people can and do receive goods, responsibilities and prestige by virtue of matrilineal descent. The clan is divided into households, each occupying a separate compound. A compound has a rectangular enclosure. Five earthenware containers, each containing magical 'medicines', are buried in the centre of the compound and beneath the four walls, facing the points of the compass. Inside each adult has a separate hut: a polygamous husband visits his wives' huts as a guest. The courtyard contains a hearth, consisting of three earthenware containers filled with earth – a fourth forms a secondary and adjacent hearth. As elsewhere in West Africa, the number three is male and the number four female. These numbers are all-important. When a child is born the umbilical cord is cut at a length of three inches for a boy and four for a girl. Then the rest of the cord and the placenta are buried to the east of the mother's hut. The ashes of the fire used to heat water for washing the mother and baby are disposed of at a crossroads, in three heaps for a boy and four for a girl. Similarly, the week is divided into two parts: the first four days are called 'the days of the men', and during them women work in the fields which the men own in common with them, while the last three days are called 'the days of the women', and during them women work in fields assigned to them alone. (According to Nicolas the number seven is also all-important, as symbolising the union of male and female.)[22]

The clan-system is reflected in the various spirits, which are in effect deities of particular clans, beneath the supreme god, Allah. Here Kure is the most important figure, and the god of farming. Doguwa is surnamed 'Black' (Baka), as the goddess of the bush, and receives black victims. There are three basic colours, red, black and white. Red gods are powerful, white gods the kindest and black gods the most dangerous. All were once, according to Hausa myth, the twin brothers of men. Some clans, those of the 'masters of water', have a hereditary relationship with another goddess bearing the name of Doguwa, Doguwa Ruwa ('The Long One of the Water'): their main activity is fishing. One clan of hunters is devoted to the worship of the main male deity of the bush, Gajere ('The Small One'), along with that of the black

Doguwa. When a girl of this clan is married a hunt is organised and is followed by a dance: the bride is seized by Gajere and falls to the ground, confirming that she is indeed an 'heiress' to her clan's inheritance.[23]

All of these beliefs and rituals, Nicolas continues, are fitted into a highly structured vision of the universe. A Hausa myth shows the first man setting off in search of partners: he goes first east, then north, then west and finally south, each time returning to his starting-point. This starting-point is the centre of the cosmos and is reflected in every ritual performed by an Anne. The latter always invokes the cardinal points and the sky and earth, calling them 'sons of Dodo'. A line going from the south-east to the north-west is seen as joining the rainy season (female) to the male Dodo. The hot part of the dry season is pre-eminently male: it is the time of clearing the ground and hunting, exclusively masculine activities. After it the rainy season comes from the south-east and runs to meet her husband, Dodo, who comes from the north-west.[24]

Thus the universe, for an Anne, does not contain inert objects or things. All parts of the universe have the same basic nature. Every being, animal, vegetable or mineral, possesses both a soul (*kurwa*) and a 'force' (*karfe*). The latter manifests itself in the form of 'health' (*lafiya*). Accordingly the various beings in the universe are never perceived as objects: even a stone has a soul which can offer resistance to human attempts to use it, attempts which have to appease its invisible supporters. The goods which one possesses are not 'things' but beings whose souls influence and are influenced by other beings.[25]

In this perspective, Nicolas remarks, all the elements of agriculture are personified. The axe is male, and the husband of the hoe. Millet is male, and thus stored in the north-west of a compound, the direction of Dodo; sorghum is female, and thus stored in the south-east, the direction of the rainy season. A well has an independent personality, even when it has not yet been dug: it is female, and the wife of the specialist who digs it. Afterwards it becomes the protectress of its village and receives offerings.[26]

Hunting also has a highly ritual character. It takes place only in the dry season. At the beginning of this there is the rite of the

'opening of the bush'. The rite consists of a hunt, together with offerings to deities and to certain places, and divination rituals relating to health and fertility. Sometimes the 'hunt' is simulated, since there is no game to be found. The hunters always follow exactly the same path, honouring specific trees even if they have now disappeared. If game is found the internal organs are inspected in order to draw conclusions about the fate of the crops in the following year.[27]

Among the activities of the more Islamised Hausa one local variant of the 'opening of the bush' is particularly significant. A woman, who is specially appointed to fulfil religious functions resembling those of the ancient Hausa queens, is dressed in the black clothes of a goddess called Takubarow (identical, it seems, with the black Doguwa). She approaches a holy tree and invokes the cardinal points, the sky and the earth. She then puts seven helpings of offerings in a hollow of the tree, for a white snake which lives in it. The snake represents the goddess' husband. As for the number seven, it represents the sum of the cardinal points, the sky, the earth and the point at which lines joining these intersect. It also represents Dodo himself, as is made clear in a magical rite performed to bring an end to excessive rainfall: seven holes are made in the northern branch of a cross drawn in the ground, and eight, representing the rainy season, in the southern one, before the magician sticks a knife in the centre to separate them. The hero who killed the snake of Daura is said to have made seven heaps out of the bits of its body. It is to be noted that in 1961, in this local variant of the 'opening of the bush', a black and red bull was sacrificed. Elsewhere black cows are immolated in memory of an ancient king and queen. In yet another area, we are told, there used to be an annual sacrifice of a spotless black bull to the black Doguwa.[28]

Later, in his account of the rebuilding of the town of Maradi in 1946, Nicolas tells us about the presence in the rituals of two wives who had been 'given' to the chief of the Gobir region when he was enthroned. Since the chief was the 'husband' of the country they represented it during a matrimonial rite in the coronation ceremonies. At the time of the town's rebuilding they believed that they were going to be sacrificed: the memories of the old human sacrifices at the town's foundation are still very much alive.[29]

The more Islamised Hausa also have an archaic rain-making rite, a 'water hunt', performed by all the married women of the village. They don the clothing of their husbands' professions and go off in a procession which mimics a hunt. Wandering through the bush, they make a sevenfold circling of all the great trees which they come across.[30]

The difference between the Anna and the more Islamised Hausa is reflected in the use of the words for 'white' and 'black'. White, among the Hausa, is the colour of Islam and peace. In the old Hausa classification of deities the 'black' gods are local protectors of specific clans, while most of the other deities are 'white'. The 'white' gods, ironically, are subdivided into 'red' and 'really white'. This is because the Hausa word for 'white' (*fari*) also means 'light'. Thus 'white' gods receive white, red or speckled victims. 'Black' gods are more violent than 'white' gods. In the new, more Islamised classification of deities, which includes a lot of new, foreign ones, these foreign gods are seen as 'black', and the 'white' gods include not only the white and red gods of the Anna, but also their black gods. By a further irony, this perspective views the 'white' gods as Muslim and the 'black' gods as non-Muslim! According to Nicolas this process of Islamisation prevented an indigenous deity from becoming the supreme god. There were Hausa candidates for this position: Kure, the black Doguwa, the white snake and Dodo. But it was Allah who was to come in and deprive them of success.[31]

Nicolas also provides valuable statistics for Hausa sacrifices. Among the Anna these are made usually in the month which sees the transition from the dry to the rainy season. Normally they are performed on the seventh day of the week (Sunday), and the most common time of day is between nine and ten in the morning.[32]

The *Bori* Cult in the 1960s

Further information about the Hausa *bori* cult was collected in the 1960s by Jacqueline Monfouga-Nicolas and published in 1972. She was also working in the Maradi valley, and also begins by considering the problem of rainfall. The rain, she observes, comes in violent showers, preceded by strong tornadoes which can destroy homes and uproot trees. It falls for only a short time and is

extremely unpredictable. The resulting uncertainty in agricultural production is reflected in the Anna's rituals and beliefs. In between these and the canonical practice of Islam stands the *bori* cult, in which the members are transformed into spirits. Nowadays the members are all women, recruited from among the more Islamised Hausa.[33]

This *bori* cult has a vast number of gods. The bad 'black' gods are opposed by good 'white' gods in what Monfouga-Nicolas calls a sort of Manichaean perspective. The white (or 'Muslim') gods, led by Kure, include a brother of his called Masharuwa, who lives in ant-hills, wells and springs and whose followers drink enormous quantities of water. The black gods are much more frightening: mad, they are cruel foreigners who cause madness, dragging their human victims into the bush. Apart from insanity they cause many physical illnesses. The *bori* gods are much more numerous than those of the Anna, and include a number of Muslim genies.[34]

Women are usually recruited to the cult when suffering from illness. Initiation is done in two separate ceremonies: the *fural saye* (literally 'porridge of roots') and the *girka* (the initiation proper). The former lasts three days, and is intended to address the illness of the individual who is being initiated. Members of the cult are possessed by the gods and bring the roots of specific plants, which are supposed to effect a cure. Some time later (in theory after one week) comes the second ceremony, which lasts seven days: after this the initiate can never leave the cult.[35]

Monfouga-Nicolas describes a *fural saye* which took place in 1965. The woman is being treated for infertility. Other women involved are the 'mother of the root' (*uwal saye*), who leads the proceedings, her assistant, and seven members of the cult who are to be possessed by the gods. They are accompanied by a male flute-player. The 'mother of the root' has prepared a porridge of millet and sorghum and collected the roots of ninety-nine plants. First, the flute-player plays the tunes associated with the seven 'white' gods involved in the ritual, and the seven designated members are possessed by them. The one possessed by Kure leads the rest in taking roots to a large pot, where they are combined with the porridge. Meanwhile, outside the patient's home, in which the ceremony is taking place, more and more spectators are assembling. Some are also members of the cult, and become

possessed as well. The flute-player sacrifices a red cock to Kure. Afterwards a meal of *tuwo* (a thick millet porridge) is eaten by the initiates and the money given by the patient is distributed among those taking part. This ends the first day of the ritual. Nothing happens on the second, but on the third a new ceremony takes place. The same people are involved, but this time none of them become possessed to begin with. They eat *tuwo* with the patient and rub it over her body. After this the 'mother of the root' and her assistant prostrate themselves before the pot of the 'porridge of roots' and pray: 'Sons of Dodo, you have heard our supplication ... Amina must be allowed to have a child. We shall be happy, you too. East and West, South and North, we pray to you.' The seven other members now become possessed and drink the liquid, along with the patient. A final prayer for a cure brings the ritual to an end.[36]

As for the initiation proper, this is also presided over by a 'mother of the root', helped by an assistant and a male musician. Here, however, there will be both 'black' and 'white' gods. The ritual is divided into two periods, of three and four days respectively. In the first the 'black' gods will be exorcised, while in the second the 'white' gods will be 'imposed' upon the new member. The ceremony described by Monfouga-Nicolas begins on a Sunday at sunset (when the Hausa day begins). The 'mother of the root' pours magical 'medicines' into a calabash filled with water. Then the initiate is washed by the assistant. Other members become possessed by the main 'white' gods. A cock is sacrificed to Kure. The initiate is made to inhale the acrid smoke of the herbs of the 'black' gods. Then the assistant is possessed by a number of these gods in turn (twenty-two in this first session, over 183 in all) and teaches the initiate the details of each one. This goes on, with intervals for sleeping and eating, until Wednesday morning, when three chickens are sacrificed. On Wednesday evening the initiate inhales the agreeable smoke of the herbs of the 'white' gods. However, she is now violently possessed by the 'black' gods and for several hours attacks the other women present, who have to control her. Eventually the assistant is possessed by Gajere – here a 'white' god – and wrestles victoriously with her, bringing this session to an end. On Thursday morning another calabash is filled with water and the medicines of the 'white' gods. On

Thursday evening the assistant introduces the initiate to thirteen of these. The process of introduction to the 'white' gods continues until Saturday evening, when the gods are asked if they want to 'stay on the head' of the initiate or go away. Then all the members present test the initiate with obscene gestures and language: she must remain indifferent and not laugh.[37]

On Sunday the ritual reaches its climax. In the morning sacrifices are made to the 'white' gods. In the afternoon the initiate is taken in a procession to an ant-hill outside the village. She is washed and dressed in fine new clothes. A chicken is sacrificed to Masasao, the younger brother of Masharuwa, who protects farmers and well-diggers. The procession returns to the village and the initiate becomes possessed in public, in the village square. From there the gods, now in her body, will be led by the assistant to her home and shown it. This happens with fifteen deities. In the evening a goat's head is eaten and again the initiate and the other members are possessed. Then the ritual comes to an end.[38]

Another ritual described by Monfouga-Nicolas is that of the 'parade' (*shagali*, a word which also means 'festivity, merrymaking', and here indicates a sort of carnival). This is a public display of the *bori* cult to the rest of the population, among which it is extremely popular. A 'parade' is organised by an individual member to demonstrate her wealth. In it the more agitated of the indigenous gods, along with some of the foreign ones, produce a highly erotic atmosphere. Women dance to musical accompaniment before individuals become possessed. Sarkin Rafi appears, an ambiguous deity who is sometimes classified as 'white', sometimes as 'black'. The foreign deities arrive in couples and demonstrate their mutual attachment without much inhibition.[39]

Yet another striking aspect of the *bori* cult is the special relationship which tends to exist between a leading member and a sort of 'client' member who serves the former as a kind of deaconess. This client is called the 'wife' of her patroness, and the marriage is indeed in evidence every Friday, when the 'wife' comes to the home of her 'husband'. The pair are close friends the rest of the time. On Fridays the client brings henna, perfumes, soap and cola-nuts: she is called 'she who pays' (*el biya*). If her patroness is married the latter's husband will have gone away. They sit together and talk like man and wife. According to one informant,

if they want to 'make the marriage' they go to a Muslim holy man and the client pays him to marry them. Then, on Fridays, they go to bed together: the patroness' husband does not realise that this happens. Monfouga-Nicolas is at pains to insist that this is not a form of 'sacred marriage', involving the union of a woman with a male deity. On the contrary, she maintains, the 'marriage' remains on the level of the 'profane'. She claims that this is proved by the attachment of the 'women who pay' to a male god, Dan Galadima, a brother of Sarkin Rafi who, like him, is a god of abundance and joy and is associated with festivities, gifts and counter-gifts. Now the patroness is often possessed by Dan Galadima during these Friday meetings, and then her client prays to him and worships him. The point, comments Monfouga-Nicolas, is that when the god comes the women never go to bed together. It is to be noted that every Friday the patroness gives her client a counter-gift in money.[10]

Monfouga-Nicolas, along with descriptions of her observations, also provides valuable analytical discussions. She points out that the Hausa, like many other peoples, have a long and extensive knowledge of a drug, datura, which has both aphrodisiac and hallucinogenic qualities. This drug is given to the initiate during the first part of the initiation-ritual, that of the 'black' gods. It seems likely that her passive and submissive behaviour in the first few days is due to a weak dose, and her delirium when fighting with the gods due to a strong one. Monfouga-Nicolas also remarks that in the towns almost all the members of the cult are prostitutes. She takes the view that 'prostitute' is a misleading word when one speaks of small towns in Africa, where it is normal for a divorced woman to live off the presents of male visitors, in a polite and socially accepted ambience, before finding a new husband. Finally, she compares the *bori* cult to the medieval French 'feast of fools', which was observed by priests in churches on certain days of the year, usually after Christmas and in particular on New Year's Day: a bishop or archbishop of fools was elected and then officiated in an obscene burlesque of Christian worship. This glorification of folly was justified by those participating as being a sort of healthy expulsion of the madness within everyone. Monfouga-Nicolas concludes that the *bori* cult is a similar phenomenon of catharsis: it is a purging of passions, purifying and therapeutic.[11]

The Afroasiatic Logic of Hausa Religion

The Hausa materials considered in this chapter make sense only in terms of the logic which we have found in other Afroasiatic fields. It is the sacrificing of black cattle to a black storm-god that dominates everything else. This is linked to matriliny in Tremearne's evidence: after the sacrifice of a black ox the new chief lives in his mother's house. The veneration of posts, wells and trees is also Afroasiatic. Kure is presumably a counterpart of 'Athtar: he has the colour red as the young warrior who sheds the storm-god's blood. Uwargona, with the colour white, doubtless corresponds to the Semitic sun-goddess. As for Sarkin Rafi, the 'King of the River', he is understandably ambiguous: his title may be given to a figure who represents the storm-god, and so he may be black, but usually, like 'Athtar, he is the beneficent god of flowing, fertilising water, and so he has to ask Allah to make the rain actually fall. Gajimare is of course another representation of the storm-god: his blue part symbolises the storm-cloud itself. As elsewhere, a female sun confronts a male moon.

Needless to say, the main black storm-god is Dodo. As in Arabia, the myths can turn him into a female witch. On the other hand, the *bori* cult would appear to be inner African in origin, like most spirit possession cults in northern Africa today. Nevertheless, it incorporates old Hausa gods, who manifest themselves according to an Afroasiatic patterning. Hausa also, one assumes, is the totem-cult in which a black bull has pride of place in the sacrificing of three animals. A black bull also figures in rain-making, in which, as in Arabia, the animal is practically identical with an old man, who wears the bull's hide and is himself threatened with murder. Significantly it is the youngest of the rain-makers who, like the children in the Yemeni folktales, says that there has been enough of a downpour. Here Allah, picturesquely, is said to have a 'big stomach'. Another version of the storm-god is the evil and supreme spirit Magiro, who demands human victims.

In Greenberg's research it is the 'King of the Genies' who takes the place of the supreme black storm-god, and who used to have human sacrifices made to him. Here one also notes the role of the king in performing sacrifices, in particular human sacrifices – for which we will find parallels in Ethiopia. The importance of

the hot period just before the rainy season is also significant. This period is compared to the murderous advent of marriage in a song sung by the bride's girl-friends in Baba's account of Hausa marriage-ceremonies. This account closely resembles Daum's depiction of weddings in Yemen: here too the bride is attacked by an old woman, whose initial application of henna (symbolising vegetation) presumably corresponds to the Yemeni custom of throwing a green cloth over the bride's head. Among the Hausa the girl-friends immediately throw themselves on top of the bride, and then are told to summon a drummer; in Yemen the bride immediately collapses on the spot, and the women present make merry around her. The next morning, in both Nigeria and Yemen, the bride is bathed. In both countries the next stage of proceedings consists essentially in the application of henna. As in Yemen, the Hausa bride has a cloth put over her head. On the wedding-day itself her girl-friends sing about a 'great hunt': one naturally thinks of the South Arabian ritual hunt, which is followed by a wedding-procession.

The evidence adduced by Nicolas is more problematic. Here the use of the numbers three and four to represent the male and the female respectively appears to be inner African, whereas in the Afroasiatic domain the reverse seems to have been originally the rule: this is what we shall find in Ethiopia. It is noteworthy that for the Hausa the 'days of the men' are four in number and the 'days of the women' are three. Kure here is typically Afroasiatic, as the god of farming: again, he is like 'Athtar. The black Doguwa's symbolism is not clear: sometimes she looks as if she is replacing the storm-god, whereas sometimes she appears mainly as Kure's wife. Dodo is united with the rainy season in a typically Afroasiatic manner, as are the various elements of agriculture, paired in a classic masculine/feminine symbolism. As in North Africa, the hot part of the dry season is pre-eminently male. As in Egypt, the individual has both a soul and a vital 'force'. The men's ritual hunt, always following the same path, and the women's water hunt are like the hunt of the South Arabian ibex. The 'giving' of maidens to the chief of the Gobir region, as the 'husband' of the country, is also typically Afroasiatic. The opposition of white and black is like that found in the Semitic field, while the triad black–red–white is something that we have already

encountered in Arabia and North Africa and shall find again in Ethiopia. It is noteworthy that the Anna's sacrifices are usually made at the transition from the dry season to the rainy one, and early in the morning: thus they resemble the Arabian sacrifices, made at the same time of day, which mark the transition from a dry summer to a wet autumn.

As regards Monfouga-Nicolas' work, it is significant that she calls the contrast between 'black' and 'white' gods 'Manichaean': Manichaeism is now thought, as we shall see, to have a Semitic rather than an Iranian origin. The proliferation of the Hausa 'black' gods resembles the result of the apparent 'splitting' and reduplication of the black god in North Africa: the proliferation of spirits called Shamarikh or Imbarken. As for the 'parade' of the foreign deities, in couples demonstrating their mutual attachment, one naturally thinks of the 'sacred marriage' of Horus and Hathor. Although Monfouga-Nicolas insists that there is no 'sacred marriage' between a 'woman who pays' and her patroness, it must be said that the structural parallel with such a marriage is very close. Lastly, it may be remarked that the French 'feast of fools' to which Monfouga-Nicolas compares the *bori* cult is itself very like the North African carnival, with its burlesque of Islamic worship.

There is one important Afroasiatic institution which we have omitted to mention in our survey of Hausa religion: circumcision. This is because very little research has been done on the Hausa life cycle.[12] Tremearne found that the practice of male circumcision among the Hausa was not due to Islam, since many non-Muslim tribes observed it. It was done between the ages of five and nine. In the case of the Hausa of Tunis the foreskin was buried in some spot outside the boy's house, being considered a 'dead man'.[13] The data so far available do not seem to be particularly useful for the comparatist.

5

The Oromo

Our survey of the Oromo people of Ethiopia and their religious beliefs begins with a brief examination of two historical works by Ethiopians, one from the sixteenth and the other from the early twentieth century. The vast amount of literature composed by European visitors to Ethiopia in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century has been thoroughly combed and exploited by more recent writers. We will therefore concentrate first on Eike Haberland's massive volume on the Oromo of southern Ethiopia before summarising the materials found in two case studies: Karl Knutsson's analysis of priesthood among the Oromo of the eastern part of the Macha region in the west of Ethiopia and Asmarom Legesse's survey of the extraordinary generation-grade system (*gada*) among the Borana branch of the Oromo in the south. Much space is devoted to Lambert Bartels' magisterial *Oromo Religion* (based on fieldwork in the west of the Macha region). Finally, Mohammad Hassen's recent history of the Oromo and George Cotter's collection of Oromo proverbs are briefly referred to.

Two Ethiopian Historians of the Oromo

Our first source for Oromo institutions is a short *History of the Oromo* composed in Old Ethiopian (a Semitic language) by Bahrey, an Ethiopian Christian priest, in 1593. According to Bahrey the Oromo are divided into two tribes, the Baraytuma and the Borana. Bahrey gives a concise account of the generation-grade system and how each generation-class reigns collectively for eight years, without any individual king. The members of a given generation-class are all circumcised at the same time. Uncircumcised fathers

abandon all their children; after being circumcised a father abandons any daughters born in the next two or three years. (We shall see the reasons for all this when summarising Legesse's work on the generation-grade system.) Men are grouped together according to whether they are circumcised or not.[1]

The author of our second Ethiopian source, Asma Giyorgis (c.1850–1915) was a member of his country's Christian clergy, a spy and a judge. His native language was a Semitic one, Amharic, the tongue of the Christian Ethiopians who established their rule over the whole of Ethiopia, but he also knew Oromo and French. He composed his *History of the Oromo* sometime after 1900, using the people's oral traditions and describing their customs, and also incorporating various written sources. It has recently been edited and translated into English by another Ethiopian scholar, Bairu Tafla, who has appended a vast number of invaluable notes.

Asma Giyorgis gives us a succession of rapid glimpses of Oromo religion. We hear of a triple sacrifice of a fawn goat, a black sheep and a white steer. The Oromo, he tells us, call the sky 'god'. They lack the First Commandment, worshipping a number of gods, but possess the other nine. Their lives are divided into periods of eight years: after five periods they are circumcised. One man who has completed this cycle rules for eight years only, bearing an olivewood sceptre impregnated with butter.[2] When the Oromo look to the sky, Asma Giyorgis informs us, they say, *Waqa guracca*. Taflu explains that Waqa means both the supreme god and also heaven; *guracca* means black, blue or dark. According to Asma Giyorgis the Oromo also worship a huge tree and anoint it with butter. They venerate the water of a small lake, beside which they kill cows, sheep and goats. The Oromo say that their first ancestor came out of this water.[3]

Haberland: The Oromo of the South

In 1963 the leading German anthropologist Eike Haberland published the results of his fieldwork on the Oromo of southern Ethiopia, conducted between 1950 and 1956. He began by arguing that the Oromo's importance for the history of Africa had been greatly exaggerated: it would be absurd to follow earlier writers in seeing them as transmitters of sacred kingship or as the founders

of Zimbabwe. Moreover, they do not seem to have invented their generation-grade system, which they share with other peoples of the Kushitic language-group. The Oromo's culture, far from being a source of recent influences upon other peoples, belongs to a common and ancient East African inheritance, which resembles those of ancient Israel and pre-Islamic Arabia.[4]

On the vexed question of the original homeland of the Oromo, Haberland takes the view that they must have been a highland people, rearing cattle and growing barley. Barley is still most holy for them, and seen as having been created by God, along with cattle, for the purpose of sacrifice. A highland origin is indicated by the calendar used by most of the Oromo, which puts the start of the year at the end of the rainy season, and the veneration given to the central pillar of the permanent conical-roofed house of those Oromo who still live in the mountains – a veneration still accorded to one of the posts supporting the ramshackle dwellings of the lowland Oromo. Haberland thinks that the original highland Oromo tribe probably consisted of two exogamous halves or 'moieties', one termed 'masculine', the other 'feminine'. The 'masculine' half would have consisted of four clans and the 'feminine' of three. This is because in Ethiopia the male principle is usually symbolised by the number four, while the female is symbolised by three. The 'archaic' peoples of Ethiopia, whose culture is not Afroasiatic, have these numbers symbolising the exact opposite (just as in West Africa, as we have seen, three is the male and four the female number). Among some Oromo tribes today this four-versus-three grouping is still preserved. A similar dualism is discovered by Haberland in Oromo religion. He sees the monotheism attributed by other writers to the Oromo as the result of Christian and Islamic influences: now the Oromo have 'God in Heaven', but before they had Heaven, the masculine principle, begetting in the work of creation and Earth, the feminine principle, giving birth.[5]

Haberland's description of the southern Oromo tribes begins with a long survey of the most southerly group, the Borana. They have completely abandoned agriculture after moving to the lowlands, and live entirely on cattle-breeding (they buy cereals from neighbouring tribes). Their climate differs from that of the rest of the Oromo, whose year begins in September, after the

main rainy season: the Borana's year starts with their main lowland rainy season, in February/March. This season, with its comparatively low rainfall, ends after about three months in May/June. Then comes the 'small dry season', of another three months. A season of small rainstorms ensues, and in November there begins the 'great dry season', painful for humans and cattle alike: its end is eagerly awaited.[6]

As in all Ethiopian tribes, a Borana husband has as many houses as he has wives, with no separate house for himself. Each house is divided into a front room for everyday life and a sacred back room: the former belongs to the wife, the latter to the husband. The back room contains holy objects, notably the phallic metal decoration for the forehead called the *kalaca*. This is found in almost all southern Ethiopian tribes (the 'archaic' ones excepted). Leading Borana men have a sceptre made of olivewood; all Borana men have special staffs.[7]

Although cattle are the most important of all animals to the Borana, sheep are also seen as holy and having come from heaven. This is the case throughout East Africa, where black sheep are sacrificed to obtain rain. By contrast, the Oromo see the goat as evil. Since cattle and sheep require water, water dominates all prayers. Milk also occupies an important place in Borana ritual. The Borana have many words for the various colours of their cattle, in contrast to the usual Ethiopian practice of recognising only three colours, white, red and black – so that a blue sky is seen as black. ('*Waqa guracca*' can mean 'the black sky' or 'Black God'.) What Europeans perceive as the green colour of vegetation is seen in Ethiopia as 'plant', not as a colour at all.[8]

The Borana, Haberland observes, have different myths of their origins. According to one, the first man came down from heaven. Travelling from the east, he met a woman coming from the opposite direction at a river, and they founded the human race. Another myth has a male snake uniting itself with a girl to be the father of the tribe. The Borana also have stories about the ancient antagonism between their two exogamous 'moieties' and the high priests thereof. This antagonism has continued up to our own time, rendering it impossible for the government to make the tribe obey a single chief.[9]

Haberland notes that the holy laws of the Borana strongly

resemble the Ten Commandments: 'Fear God (Heaven), fear the Earth, fear the well, fear the grass, fear your father, fear your mother, fear your elder brother ... Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not lie ...' He thinks that this reflects an old connection between the Semitic and Kushitic-speaking peoples. Another similarity with the Bible is found at the death-bed of a Borana father: all his sons hurry to him, bearing gifts, to receive his blessing, in the manner of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27). In the course of giving them his blessing he sermonises them and (at least according to legend) makes prophecies. Usually he just divides up what he is bequeathing and exhorts his younger sons to accept the authority of their eldest brother.[10]

Further similarities to Semitic traditions are found in the Borana's religious ceremonies. In their festivals the link between rain and semen is made explicit: their hymns sing of rain filling ponds just as semen fills the house (i.e. produces descendants) and intercourse produces children. Normally the Borana avoid using the words for 'semen' and 'intercourse' as shameful: the words are reserved for their festivals. Yet more similarities are to be found in Borana sacrifices. These should not be made when the moon is waning. Usually they are performed at sunrise. It is noteworthy that, as is generally the case in Ethiopia, black animals are sacrificed only in rain-ceremonies.[11]

Haberland's surveys of the other southern Oromo tribes are less rich in detail, and I shall not consider them here. He does, however, provide an extended analysis of southern Oromo religion in general, and this commands our attention. Haberland takes the view that resemblances with the religion of ancient Israel are not confined to the religion of the Oromo alone, but are found among almost all of the peoples of south-eastern Ethiopia. They probably go back to an Afroasiatic legacy. Common elements of such a legacy would be: the sky god and supreme god as creator of the world, characterised especially by thunderstorms; bloody sacrifices; sacrifice by exposure; the concept of blood's belonging to the deity alone; designating animals as substitute victims by cutting their ears; high places (but also the threshold) for sacrifices; sanctification of the law; similar prayers, blessings and food-taboos; religious importance of snakes; the opposition of hereditary high priests and elected political leaders; removal to heaven of priests

and prophets after their deaths; the significance of the number forty; pilgrimages; and many mythical themes, such as those of the stolen blessing and the parting of the waters.[12]

It is further argued by Haberland that the Oromo of the south, being much less influenced by Christianity and Islam than their cousins in the north and west, provide evidence of this common Afroasiatic legacy: thus they see God and Heaven as one, unlike the other Oromo, who make a clear distinction between the two. One southern Oromo tribe, the Arussi, have one good and one bad god. The former thunders and gives rain, while the latter tries to stop this happening. Southern Oromo tribes also believe in a mythical man-eating monster, whose homeland is always located somewhere to the south of where they live.[13]

Haberland's presentation of the Oromo calendar is full of interest. The months (reckoned from the new moon) are classified as lucky or unlucky. Thus the tenth month (June–July), since it marks the beginning of the main rainy season in the Ethiopian highlands, is seen as a lucky month of feasting, and so is the eleventh; but the twelfth, which comes just before the long dry season, is seen as particularly unlucky. Similarly, given days of the month are lucky or unlucky. The first two are lucky, but not the third. The fifteenth, the day of the full moon, is very lucky and associated with cattle. The eighteenth and the nineteenth are lucky, and especially suitable for marriages (and among the Arussi for circumcisions). It is to be noted that, as among other Afroasiatic-speaking peoples, the sun is feminine and the moon is masculine. Prayers are offered to the new moon by the Oromo, who hold grass up to it and ask it to enrich them with cattle.[14]

Southern Oromo myths and folktales are also the subject of a general overview by Haberland (in addition to his survey of Borana myths, summarised above). Creation is the work of God (Heaven) and his wife, the Earth. The Earth dried up, producing cracks, and Heaven rained into these, producing mountains and valleys. According to one myth they had a daughter, who married a black snake: from this union all humans are descended. We also find the story of the stolen blessing, widespread in north-eastern Africa. A father has three or four sons, and, when he is old and blind, wishes to bless the eldest. The second son, egged on by their mother, impersonates his elder brother, obtains the blessing

and becomes the ancestor of the Amhara, the ruling people of Ethiopia.[15]

Knutsson: Priesthood among the Western Oromo

In 1967 the Swedish anthropologist Karl Knutsson published a book based on his fieldwork, done from 1960 to 1964, among the eastern Macha subdivision of the Oromo, who inhabit western Ethiopia. (Knutsson also spent some time among the southern Oromo.) His study concentrates on consideration of the priest (*qallu*), and his ritual and political roles. The fieldwork was done among farmers in the highlands and on the mountain slopes. For these farmers cattle-breeding, compared to agriculture, is less important.[16]

Knutsson explains that for the Macha God (Waqa), or, as he prefers to call him, Divinity, is one. However, God and humans communicate through certain agents, an agent being called an *ayana*. This word *ayana* can mean a sort of divine being, which may possess or 'descend upon' humans. The word can also mean a human's personality, or a sort of guardian divinity which creates that personality and perches on one's right shoulder. Such a guardian divinity exists also for a family and a clan. The word *ayana* can also mean 'luck' or 'day (as lucky or not)'.[17]

An *ayana* operates in a dualistically-conceived universe, which is divided into human and suprahuman realms: the various *ayanas* belong to the latter, and can be either good or evil. They can also be either male or female. The senior male *ayana* is that of the father of a family and is identified with God's first incarnation, who is called Nabi and, in some myths, is the father of the first thirty children to inhabit the earth. As for the senior female *ayana*, she is a divinity called Atete, who represents the fertility of women and appears to be interchangeable with another female figure, Maram. 'Maram' takes her name from the Mary of Christianity and Islam, but has a specifically Oromo character, and is usually called 'my mother'. More dualism is found in the Macha's houses, which are built on an east-west axis, the door facing the east, and also with a left-right symbolism, since a son's house must have his father's on its right, denoting respect.[18]

As for the word for 'priest', *qallu*, Knutsson explains that among

the Macha this now means an expert in ritual who is possessed by one or more *ayanas*. (This reflects the fact that spirit-possession has recently taken over the institution of priesthood here.) The word *qallu* is probably derived from the Oromo root *qal-*, meaning to slaughter.[19] In a way the priest is almost identical with the *ayana* who possesses him; in another perspective the priest and the *ayana* have a bipolar relationship, when the former prays or sacrifices or when he is seen as 'owning' the *ayana*. More bipolarity is found in the priest's paraphernalia. In the cult of Maram his wife wears on her right shoulder a leather band decorated with cowrie shells and called the *chachu*, the main female holy object: this is put on the priest's left shoulder when he is about to be possessed. Correspondingly, the cult of Nabi is characterised by a war-spear and the main male holy object, the *kalaca*, which among the eastern Macha is a conical lump of iron. Both holy objects, according to Macha myth, came down from heaven. During a drought a man agreed to sacrifice one of his sons, and just as the knife was put to his throat a lamb descended from the skies, bearing the *chachu* and the *kalaca*. Rain fell, and the boy survived to become the ancestor of rain-makers.[20]

The male-female bipolarity is reflected in a procedure governed by the priest's political and judicial functions. If one of the parties in a dispute curses the other, using the name of an *ayana*, then an elaborate procedure is needed to lift the curse. The priest to whom the *ayana* belongs has to be identified and the case referred to him as judge. After the case is settled the party who has uttered the curse has to chew seven blades of grass in a shrine sacred to Maram and spit upwards seven times and downwards seven times, while the party who has been cursed says, 'Did you lift the curse according to the holy laws of Maram and Nabi?' Then this rite is repeated in a shrine sacred to Nabi, with the number seven being replaced by nine.[21]

One important aspect of the *qallu* institution is the Oromo pilgrimage to a high priest called the Abba Muda, 'The Father of the Anointment'. Knutsson quotes nineteenth and early-twentieth-century European sources on this pilgrimage. In the 1840s male pilgrims from the north-west of the Macha region would leave their homes in June for Mount Wallel (in the same area). After starting off they would not cut their hair or nails, and during

their absence their wives would eat only bread baked by themselves. In the 1870s the southern Macha used to travel unarmed to an Abba Muda who lived in a grotto with large snakes. He would bless and anoint them. The pilgrims had to be married and circumcised. On the journey they were, it is said, dressed as women. They brought a bull as an offering to the high priest. In the 1920s pilgrims of the Gombiccu, a southern tribe of the Oromo, would prepare for the pilgrimage by shaving their heads, leaving a tuft on the top like small boys. They had to observe sexual abstinence before and during the journey. On their return they would plant a sycamore to show that they had reached a rank called *jila*, which involved avoiding weapons and anything to do with war.[22]

Since Knutsson was not able to observe a pilgrimage (it happens once in eight years), he had to fall back upon Haberland's account of Borana practice. According to this the Borana go to a high priest who lives to the north of their territory. They bring him calves, travelling unarmed. He entertains them with meat and honey wine, and they spend the night dancing and feasting. The following morning the priest gives them myrrh, spits more myrrh on them and says, 'May you get plenty of cattle and children, may you live happily and have long lives!'[23]

Legesse: The Generation-Grade System (*gada*)

In 1973 a remarkable work on the Oromo generation-grade system (*gada*) was published by the Ethiopian anthropologist Asmarom Legesse. This represents the result of fieldwork done among the Borana from 1962 to 1971. It also considers the important Borana custom whereby a married woman has a special relationship with a lover: this relationship is termed 'cicisbean' by Western scholars, from the Italian word *cicisbe*, which denotes a male lover of this kind. As we shall see, this custom is closely connected to the generation-grade system.[24]

Legesse explains that this system probably arose out of an institution of age-sets, that is to say of groups of people who are roughly of the same age and share collective social responsibilities. Age-sets are common in East Africa. However, in addition to age-sets (*hariyyas*) the Borana also have generation-classes (*lubas*),

membership of which is determined by reference to one's father, so that sons of very different ages belong to the same class. Each generation-class moves through a succession of generation-grades, which involve specific corporate responsibilities and usually last eight years. The most important rule of the system is that the new-born boy enters the succession of generation-grades forty years (and thus five grades) behind his father – and thus may join very old men in the same generation-class![25]

In the first grade boys grow their hair long, like girls, and are addressed as 'girls'. They have no sisters, since any who are born have been exposed to die or have been given up for adoption. Boys can have sisters only when they reach the second grade. Their fathers are in the grade which involves ruling the rest of the Borana. On entering the second grade the boys' heads are shaved and they are no longer addressed as 'girls'. In the third grade the boys enter an age-set, a group of people born in the same eight-year period. When they enter the fourth grade both the generation-class and the age-set are formally defined, with elected leaders for each: both groups continue to intersect and complement each other until their members die. At the start of the fifth grade those men who are in their twenties or early thirties are expected to get married. Their brides are about thirteen or fourteen. The men are strictly prohibited from marrying before their generation-class has reached this grade. Until this point they have 'cicisbean' relationships with married women, whose husbands consent to this and are the official fathers of any children. These relationships evidently enable the generation-grade system to work. The fifth grade, unlike the others, which last eight years, lasts thirteen. It is divided into two sections. During the first, which lasts eight years, the men who have married cannot have any children: all children born to their wives have to be exposed to die. At the end of the eight years there is a 'fatherhood' ceremony. After a period of ritual purity the men sacrifice steers, dress as women for a while, take branches from a sacred tree, make them into ceremonial staffs and anoint them with butter. After this they sacrifice a bull, shave their heads and have mock marriages with their wives. During the second section, that of the next five years, they can have sons, but do not bring them up: this is done by others. Any daughters born to them are exposed to die.[26]

This infanticide, explains Legesse, is to assist warfare: a man must fight before he can be a father, and children are a hindrance to warriors' mobility. The Borana warrior is required to take part in a ritual war called the *butta.* In the past, according to Borana informants, the ritual was led by a man chosen specially for this purpose. He fed and cared for a sacred bull, and then guided it in front of two lines of fighters: the oldest members of the first section of the fifth grade, and the age-set which corresponded to the oldest members of the fourth grade. The leader took everyone to enemy territory and released the sacred bull among the cattle of a kraal there. A fight ensued between this bull and the leading bull of the kraal, and its outcome was taken as an omen: if the sacred bull won the Borana would go and fight, but if not they would go home.[27]

The sixth grade is the most important: in it the generation-class stays in power. A bull is sacrificed in the special ceremony by which the new class is invested as masters. The class gives its name, which is also that of its leader, to the eight-year period during which it is in office. This leader, according to the Borana, is 'the god that gives one refuge because one cannot reach the God of the heavens'. However, it is only during a crisis that his divine status is taken seriously: usually he just merges into the crowd.[28]

In the second year of the sixth grade the men are circumcised and have their ears pierced. A cow is sacrificed before the ear-piercing is done, and then the men camp in special ceremonial grounds. They bathe in huts there before the actual circumcision itself. In the fifth year the men perform the 'anointment' pilgrimage. Legesse presents this not as an 'anointment' of the pilgrims by the high priest, but rather a symbolic 'anointment' of the priest by the pilgrims, performed by giving him presents. The Borana men in power make offerings to both of the two high priests, saying for example, 'I anoint you with this bull, that I may become rich with bulls and heifers, that I may be rich with cows and calves, that I may be rich with sons and daughters.' Each of the high priests releases poisonous snakes, which symbolise the priest himself.[29] After the sixth grade comes the long stage of grades seven to ten, lasting twenty-seven years. Now the men are semi-retired, but have 'advisory authority'. Finally, in the eleventh

grade, they engage in a sort of monasticism, and call themselves 'monks' when speaking to Christians. When men enter this grade there is a ceremony which also involves the departure from it of the preceding generation-class. The latter are the fathers of the class in power, and their sons, after sacrificing livestock, demand to hear how they have killed men and wild beasts. This ceremony lasts from sunrise until the evening. The new members of the eleventh grade cannot bear arms or kill any living creature. People come to them for blessings and sanctuary.[30]

Legesse observes that this system involves a rigid segregation of generations, so that fathers and sons are constantly involved in a 'mock battle'. This is probably because a father can go on marrying young brides of the same age as his sons. Thus a man is prohibited from having intercourse with women in the generation-classes of his father and his son. A woman belongs to the generation-class of her brothers, and if she marries outside it belongs also to that of her husband.[31]

Bartels: A General Survey of Oromo Religion

In 1983 the Dutch Catholic missionary and anthropologist Lambert Bartels published his *Oromo Religion*, based on his experiences and research among the western Macha: his fieldwork was done from 1968 to 1980. The book is an invaluable survey of all aspects of Oromo religion: it covers myths, Waqa, the *ayanas*, the role of the aristocracy, sacrifice, weddings, taboos, the concept of 'respectful distance' (*saffu*) and much more besides.

Bartels begins by considering the western Macha's myths about their country of origin. They believe that this was to the east of where they live now, on the other side of the Gibe river. When they moved across this their prophet, Makko Billi, stood on a green hill and gave the people their laws. He said that every eight years there would be the ritual known as *butta*. Bartels says that this means the slaughtering of a bull by each member of the generation-class holding power. The eastern Macha say that they came out of the holy lake called Wolabo in southern Ethiopia. Bartels explains that the Macha see all life as being born from water. Their supreme being, Waqa, is perceived as descending in low-hanging rain-clouds. Up to the late nineteenth century the

western Macha's attachment to their country of origin was reflected in their pilgrimages to a 'Father of Anointment', one of the Borana high priests in the south-east. They would bring myrrh and a bull to him, and he would anoint them with butter. A man could go on this pilgrimage only after killing his *butta* bull.[32]

After these preliminaries Bartels proceeds to the subject of Waqa himself. The name means far more than 'God': it includes innumerable manifestations of God, as well as the vault of the sky. Waqa is particularly close to old people, who can thus transmit their blessing by sprinkling others with their saliva. Previously, out of respect, Waqa was not called by his name. The Oromo also call him 'the Unique'. They dislike the Christian ideas of the Trinity and the 'God of love', and the concept of 'God the Father' is also alien to them. Their God is, as an Oromo Catholic priest puts it, 'the God of the sky and the stars and the clouds, the God of thunder and lightning'. The Macha sometimes speak of Waqa's having red eyes, meaning his anger, displayed as lightning in a dark sky: they explain that the lightning flashes only for a while, but the dark sky remains as it is, since Waqa is always 'the dark Waqa whose inside is white'. Here 'white' means the pure, undisturbed and real character of Waqa. As Haberland remarked, the pairing 'Waqa and the earth' is not so prominent among the western Macha as among the southern Oromo, though it does appear in blessings, curses, oaths and rituals. Waqa is generally called on alone, but the earth is rarely called on without Waqa. Bartels observed a ritual in which a black sheep was sacrificed when people were starting to cultivate new land: the blood was sprinkled on the earth and the meat was burned to be smelled by Waqa.[33]

As for the *ayanas* in which Waqa manifests himself, Bartels' informants explain that they are the invisible parts of things, perceived by people's hearts. Everything has an *ayana*, except the earth, which is seen as divided into stretches of land with an individual *ayana* for each one. The *ayanas* are Waqa or something of Waqa, but Waqa is not an *ayana* or the *ayanas* in general. They are not like branches or sons of his. People have their own *ayanas* from before birth. Then a child's *ayana* communicates with him, and later determines whether he will be a killer or a farmer. The Macha pray to the *ayanas* of their parents, and see all the *ayanas*

as flowing out of Waqa and making all creatures the way they are.[31]

Waqa is also thought to be particularly close to the Macha's aristocracy, who, confusingly, are called the *borana* (we shall use a small 'b' to distinguish them from the Borana subdivision of the Oromo). The *borana* are believed to have a special power to bless and curse, and thus to possess a tongue coloured dark-blue on the underside. This is connected to the dark Waqa, who both gives rain and kills with lightning. The *borana* are particularly associated with the male ritual object called the *kalaca*, which is used to curse, while the female ritual object, the *chachu*, is used to bless. A *kalaca* is handed down from father to son in a *borana* lineage and is used to curse people who refuse to put an end to a quarrel. By contrast, the *chachu* can be owned by non-*borana* women. Macha women take it to the places of their libations and to their ritual meals under a tree. Bartels notes that the *borana* have tended not to work so much as other members of society: this goes together with the general Macha view that one is dependent on Waqa's will and should rely upon him. Previously the leader of the generation-class holding power was not allowed to tire himself out, to plough or to cut trees. He had to keep his house full of food and drink, and he had to belong to a *borana* family long blessed with good health by Waqa. The *borana* do not eat any animal's forelegs, because the latter contain its power – like the *borana* among the people. Bartels observes that both the association between forelegs and power and the prohibition are found in the religion of ancient Israel. Moreover, before the Macha generation-grade system collapsed, some men who had finished their period in power, and who had distinguished themselves by wisdom and by being manifestly blessed by Waqa, would go on acting as ritual leaders, rather like priests: their name, *lobota*, is linguistically related to 'Levites'.[35]

Bartels also provides valuable information about how the *butta* ritual of slaughtering a bull used to be performed. Apparently in the eastern Macha region this would be done near a marsh, which was usually part of a river-bed: the wetness represented fertility. Among the Macha who came to the western Macha region it was also normal to kill the bull near a river, but, it is related, a lame man who could not do so sacrificed his bull in front of his house, and his subsequent prosperity led others to do

likewise. When brothers performed this ritual as members of the generation-class in power their sisters would be present: here a woman followed her brothers but not her husband.[36]

Killing, Bartels explains, is the male counterpart of a woman's giving birth. A man also 'kills' in sexual intercourse, especially in a defloration. The Christian Macha have a ritual celebration of killing in September, at the new year, beneath the Ethiopian Christian overlay of the Feast of the Cross. Saplings are bound together to form a 'tree', and people make a bonfire of it in the evening. The Macha say that previously this was done in the early morning. Nowadays, on the following morning, men and boys come to the ashes. Men who have killed big game point their spears at the unburned stumps of the saplings, which represent masculinity. They sing of how they have killed animals, but these animals are in fact insignificant: a rat, a porcupine and so on, as opposed to elephants and other important and dangerous animals, which here one must not boast of having killed. This is unlike the usual triumph-songs: in this instance it is just the killing itself that counts.[37]

A similar symbolism is found in the Macha wedding-ritual. The groom pierces coffee-fruits with a spear and then uses the latter to slaughter a sheep, which is identified with the bride herself. When a child is born songs are sung which compare the woman's bravery to that of a successful hunter. Correspondingly, a man who has killed a buffalo praises his mother for giving birth to him and rearing him to be a courageous hunter. He is rewarded by being anointed with butter. The killing of the buffalo is compared to the defloration of a bride. As opposed to the slaughter of cattle and sheep, the killing of strong wild animals like elephants and buffaloes requires a peace-making ritual to appease their *ayanas*. Coffee-fruits are also said to be 'slaughtered' in a special ritual in which they symbolise women and which is performed by married women. The fruits are bitten open and cooked in butter. Their bursting is seen as paralleled in the 'bursting out' of a killer breaking into a triumph-song, of a woman who has given birth starting to shout in triumph and of a dying father suddenly regaining enough strength to give his last blessing. Among the Arussi this ritual is performed by men.[38]

The link between hunting and sex reappears in the taboos concerning conversations between successive generations. Macha

are divided into two classes, *obos* and *choras*. If a man is an *obo*, then his son is a *chora* and his grandson is an *obo*. His daughters join the classes of their husbands. An *obo* and a *chora* must not talk to each other about sex or hunting-rituals. They have to maintain a respectful distance from each other, this respectful distance being termed *saffu*. Thus father and son can never have intercourse with the same woman. Moreover, all men and all married women can have intercourse only with partners in the same class. Children grow up close to their grandparents but not to their parents. When the old generation-grade system was operating the grandfather had to witness his grandson's slaughtering his *butta* bull, but the father was not allowed to see this: it represented the son's becoming a true adult and replacing him. Among the western Macha this was done in the fourth year of a man's being in the period of holding power.[39]

Bartels provides a long analysis of the concept of *saffu*, which means much more than the 'respectful distance' which we have just encountered. *Saffu* is used to mean 'fate' or 'troublesome behaviour'. A man who has committed an evil act says, 'It is not my *saffu*. *Saffu* is from Waqa.' The Macha explain that it means everything that they do not understand, or that it means knowing how to behave according to their laws. Grains of maize and humans are *saffu* to one another: the latter must respect the former. The word is used as an adjective, not just as a noun. *Saffu* also means a kind of divine law, as opposed to the law of the Macha's prophet, Makko Billi. In this sense the *saffu* used to be ritually proclaimed when a new generation-class took power. This was done on a mountain, beneath a tree (symbolising truth), in the rainy season, before dawn. A *borana* would recite: 'Thorns and the soles of the feet are *saffu* to one another … Small and great are *saffu* to one another …' and so on. There is also a relationship of *saffu* between humans on the one hand and animals like monkeys and antelopes on the other: the latter are a threat to crops but are treated with respect by the Macha.[40]

Hassen: The Oromo in History

This concept of *saffu* is taken up by the Ethiopian historian Mohammed Hassen in his history of the Oromo from 1570 to

1860 (published in 1990). He concentrates on the Oromo of the region round the Gibe river in western Ethiopia, a river which, as we have seen, was crossed by the western Macha on the way to their present lands. The idea of *saffu*, says Hassen, is like the Marxist law of the unity of opposites, but differs in having no struggle between opposites: opposing elements like ashes and flour or slave and master live in peaceful coexistence. *Saffu* is the Macha's view of the cosmic and social order. The main ideas, along with respect and distance, are harmony and avoidance.[11]

Hassen stresses the importance of the extreme fertility of the Gibe region. For the agricultural Oromo cultivated land was an inalienable right and corresponded to the cow among the pastoral Oromo. Among the latter, even after warfare between tribes, a cow would be returned to her owner, as part of his family. In the same way, the agricultural Oromo would not expropriate each other's cultivated land after a victory. There was understood to be a kind of mystical bond between this land and its owners.[12]

The Islamisation of the Oromo in the Gibe region is also analysed by Hassen. A phenomenon of the nineteenth century, it happened without great difficulty, partly because the transition from Waqa to Allah was not a considerable one. The *butta* feast continued. Hassen takes the view that in the old generation-class system this feast was followed by the ritual war and the term *butta* meant both. The war was against either big game or human warriors.[13]

Cotter: Oromo Proverbs

The Oromo concept of God or Waqa which we have found in our sources is echoed in the collection of Oromo proverbs published in 1992 by the American Catholic missionary George Cotter, who has also provided English translations and explanations. God's absolute predestination of everything is stressed. He helps humans without being heard, and only he can fill a person's heart. God should not be so ruthless. Somehow the earth manages to bear what he has created. God is the cause of everything. His word is like a grinding stone. One should not be jealous of what God gives to others. It is necessary to respect the leader of the generation-class in power as one respects God himself. Waqa is a donkey rolling in the dust (he favours people or not, as he wishes).

'The Waqa of children is the stick.' 'The hand which God cut off feels no pain (one accepts his acts gracefully).' 'One does not understand the deeds of God or the laughter of a dog.' God makes a poor man break wind, so that he is driven away. When he wishes to harm a poor man he begins by killing his mind. One must be grateful for what little one receives, since Waqa has said, 'The person who does not like my clouds will not even like my rain.' Waqa has also said, to the lazy man, 'I've warned you with thunder and lightning [that the rainy season is coming], so do you think I've got a sickle to cut the grass for thatching your roof?' However much people beg Waqa to change their condition, what he has decided will happen: 'A person does not stop praying, and God does not change what he has decided.' The world has its hierarchy: a boy will not equal his parents, just as his parents will never equal God. People are right to praise God when someone is killed by lightning (since, it is believed, lightning kills only the cursed, the community rejoices).[44]

The Afroasiatic Character of Oromo Religion

In Oromo religion one sees yet again the dominant position of the Afroasiatic black storm-god, the centrality of circumcision as a preliminary to true adulthood and fatherhood, and the veneration accorded to water and trees. Of particular interest is the colour-scheme black–red–white, which we have already encountered among the Hausa and in Arabia. (It is found in most of Ethiopia.[45]) With regard to all these elements the Ethiopian historians provide valuable evidence. Our sixteenth-century source, Bahrey, provides confirmation of the antiquity of various Oromo institutions: dual organisation, the generation-grade system, adult circumcision and infanticide. The early twentieth-century historian, Asma Giyorgis, tells us of a triple sacrifice of a black sheep, a fawn goat and a white steer: this looks particularly Afroasiatic. He confirms Haberland's evidence that the Oromo have most of the Ten Commandments. The olivewood sceptre mentioned by Asma Giyorgis also seems typically Afroasiatic as a symbol of male fertility. Asma Giyorgis also supports Bartels' testimony about the Oromo perception of God as dark-blue Heaven and the veneration of Lake Wolabo (which is important for pilgrimages).[46]

Haberland's materials are valuable as showing the Oromo use of the numbers four and three to symbolise the male and the female respectively, as opposed to the inner African custom of doing the exact opposite. Again, dualism is strongly rooted in the masculine-feminine opposition and the division of a tribe into moieties, as in North Africa. This is also reflected in the division of the Oromo house into two parts, one for the wife and everyday life, the other for the husband and the sacred: Bourdieu found much the same in the Kabyle home, with a 'lower' part for 'natural' activities, seen as 'female', and a 'higher' part for 'cultural' activities, seen as 'male'. We have seen comparable dualistic divisions in ancient Egyptian houses. Aptly, the first Borana father is said to have come down from heaven, or to have been a black snake. (This last element echoes what we found among the Hausa.) Typically Afroasiatic also is the preoccupation with the right time for sacrifices: they must not be performed while the moon is waning, and are usually done at dawn. The Oromo's interest in the third day of the month is paralleled in Arabia: perhaps it is unlucky because (on the Arabian side at least) it is associated with the exposure of a maiden. That the middle of the month should be seen as suitable for marriage and circumcision is easily understandable in the light of Daum's Yemeni evidence.

Knutsson's study is also rich in dualistic oppositions: human/suprahuman, good/evil, east/west – as in Kabylia, it is to the east that the door must face. One is naturally tempted to link the word for priest, *qallu*, derived by Knutsson from the root meaning 'to slaughter', to the ancient Akkadian word for a type of priest considered by Daum, *kalu*: in both Ethiopia and Iraq the priest sacrifices a bull. The Macha myth of a lamb's coming to be substituted for a son is of course to be compared to the biblical story of the ram and Isaac. As for the taboos surrounding the pilgrims to the Abba Muda, they are also found in the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Legesse's picture of Borana extra-marital affairs is of interest when compared to Herodotus' stories of ancient North African promiscuity. It is to be noted that according to Haberland the Amhara see the Borana as completely promiscuous, when in fact liaisons are strictly limited.[17] A Borana man places his spear

outside the hut of the married woman whom he is visiting: this resembles the practice found in North Africa, Arabia and elsewhere of planting a staff in the ground before a temporary union.[48] The prohibition of certain liaisons is probably due to the strong father–son antagonism, which looks Afroasiatic: the conflict between generations is reflected in that between the 'black god' and the young god who kills him. It would appear that an originally East African (and not Afroasiatic) age-set system has been given an Afroasiatic logic by its development into a system of opposing generation-classes. For the most important rule of the Oromo generation-grade system is that the son has to enter the system at a point forty years behind his father. Thus when the father's generation-class is in the grade which involves ruling the rest of the Borana the son is opposed to him as a 'girl'. The reason for the segregation of generations seems to be the need to prevent a son from having intercourse with his father's young wives.

Bartels' overview of Oromo religion contains a vast number of pieces of information which evoke Afroasiatic parallels. Life is born from water, and God comes down in rain-clouds. He is close to the old, who transmit their 'blessing' by spitting on others: in North Africa people transmit their 'blessing' (*baraka*) by spitting into other people's mouths.[49] Like the God of the Hebrew Bible, Waqa was previously not mentioned by his name. The idea that one should rely on God instead of working, exemplified in the habits of the Macha aristocracy, is well-attested in Islam, notably in North Africa.[50]

As for the significance of the Macha ritual performed in September, at the new year, this is far from clear, but we shall find more light cast on it by similar Ethiopian rituals considered in the next chapter. For the moment we may recall that for most Ethiopians the new year comes as part of the transition from a wet summer to a dry autumn, whereas for the Borana it comes when a painfully dry winter gives way to an eagerly awaited wet spring. Significantly, the Macha say that their bonfire used to be made in the early morning, whereas now it is made in the evening. Differences in practice appear to reflect differences in climate, as Daum found when distinguishing between 'Proto-Semitic' and 'Old Semitic' customs. Here one will observe that in the Macha

wedding-ritual a sheep is sacrificed when the bride is brought to the groom's house: in the same way, in northern Yemen, a ram is sacrificed in front of the groom's house when the bride is brought there – this is seen by Daum as part of an 'Old Semitic' development.[51]

Bartels provides further evidence regarding the father-son antagonism. The father is not permitted to watch his son sacrifice his *butta* bull, because this represents the son's replacing him. (It is to be noted that traditionally this sacrifice has been performed near a river-bed.) However, the sacrificer's grandfather is required to watch: we have a contrast between the relationships of successive and alternate generations, resembling what Bourdieu found in Kabylia, and also evidenced among the Hausa, where grandparents and grandchildren have special 'joking' relationships.[52] Parents and children have to maintain a 'respectful distance' (*saffu*): this concept of separation is, as in Egypt, linked to the storm-god. As Hassen points out, in *saffu* there is no struggle between the opposites, as in Marxism (which insists on overcoming oppositions, whereas for the Oromo they go on for ever). Cotter's collection of Oromo proverbs shows the Oromo as accepting God's predestination of everything: this is like mainstream Islam.

Throughout this chapter we have seen extremely strong parallels between Oromo and Semitic religion. Often, as Haberland argues, these parallels appear to be independent of Christian and Islamic influences, and to go back to a shared Kushitic and Semitic past. Now linguists have found that when one compares Afroasiatic languages the Kushitic and Semitic branches of the Afroasiatic family are very closely connected, and, together with Berber, form a sub-family. In the same way the Egyptian branch is close to the Chadic one (best represented in Hausa), so that they too seem to form a sub-family, which might also include the Omotic branch.[53] Thus the similarities between Oromo and Semitic religion may to some extent be attributed to contacts in a period when the earliest speakers of the Kushitic and Semitic dialects were living in close proximity.

6

Omotic Ethiopia

In looking at the religions of the Omotic-speakers of south-west Ethiopia we will first consider the enormous work devoted to the Kafa people by the Austrian anthropologist Friedrich Bieber (1873–1925). We will also examine the criticisms of Bieber's contribution and more recent studies of the Kafa. We will then review the survey of selected Omotic-speaking peoples done by the German anthropologist Helmut Straube in the 1950s and 1960s, with particular attention to the institution of sacred kingship. Finally, we will return to Eike Haberland and his general observations on kingship in Ethiopia, before briefly analysing the results of some later fieldwork.

Bieber: A Flawed Vision of Kafa Religion and Kingship

Friedrich Bieber's fieldwork on the Kafa people (who live in the north-west of the Omotic domain) was done in 1905 and 1909, and his findings were published in 1920 and 1923. They fill over a thousand pages, and cover every aspect of Kafa life. Unfortunately, as reviewers were quick to point out, they are seriously misleading on Kafa religious belief. Bieber was obsessed with the idea of 'divine kingship' and the possibility of linking the Kafa to ancient Egypt. However, a lot of his materials do seem to be genuine enough, and correspond to what has been found by other observers.[1]

The Kafa, Bieber tells us, divide the year into three seasons, which they call 'gifts of God (Yero)': the dry season lasting from September to March, the small rainy season, lasting from March to May, and the great rainy season or harvest season, lasting from May to September. In the small rainy season there is not much

rain, but in the great rainy season it falls every day, mostly in thunderstorms. Protracted droughts are very rare, and there are no professional rain-makers. A number of feasts were celebrated by the Kafa before 1897, when they were conquered by the Amhara, who had already dominated the region and influenced its traditions. The Kafa king would perform a special sacrifice for his predecessor at the end of August, on a mountain called Shosha, where the kings were buried, and then sacrifice a bull in the royal town of Shadda before returning to his capital city, Anderacha. Here a special hut was constructed for him out of freshly cut branches: thus the new year festival, held on the 10th, 11th and 12th September, was also called the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles. (As we noted above, Ethiopian Christianity is characterised by its preservation of the institutions of the Hebrew Bible, the influence of which is evident here.) The king entered this hut and, as always, remained invisible to his people, who rendered homage to him outside.[2]

More important, however, was the Feast of the Cross, celebrated shortly afterwards, on the seventeenth day of the first month of the year. Now the sun had apparently turned back from the north and reached its highest position over the Kafa's land: the dry season was beginning. The warriors would wear their phallic head-ornaments (called, as among the Oromo, *kalacas*), and so would the king himself. They and the rest of the people would assemble in the morning and throw torches on to a bonfire with a cross in the middle. Afterwards oxen were slaughtered. The warriors then gathered in front of the king, carrying the penises of the enemies whom they had killed in the previous year. After reciting the accounts of their heroic deeds they threw these trophies before their royal master. He rewarded them with gifts and a *kalaca* for each warrior killed. A three-day banquet ensued.[3]

Bieber follows his description of these feasts with an analysis of Kafa religious beliefs. Unfortunately he completely misunderstood the spirit possession cult which had become prevalent in the country by his time. He was confused by the Kafa word for a spirit in this cult, *eqo*, and thought that the Kafa had always had a supreme god with a similar name, 'Heqo', of Egyptian origin. Bieber imagined that this god was believed to be incarnated in the king, making him divine, and also mistook the king's head-

dress for an Egyptian-style crown. All the same, his account of the king's sacrifices is extremely valuable.[4]

The king of Kafa had to perform special sacrifices of bulls on mountains and at rivers. Every year he had to go to a mountain called Buto, where he sacrificed at the mouth of a river which, like the river it flows into, has its source in the mountain. Similarly, each year he sacrificed at the summit of a mountain called Gidda, apparently with reference to another river which has its source nearby. Another such sacrifice was also performed at the source of a river, between two hills. All these sacrifices were done in the uninhabited wilderness of the highlands. The king would wear a green cloak when going to officiate. He would slit the bull's throat and pour its blood into the river. The dead animal itself would also be thrown into the river or left to be devoured by vultures. More cattle would then be slaughtered for an enormous meal.[5]

There was also an annual sacrifice of another kind, on a plain near the royal town of Shadda, for the 'good health of the king'. Again, a bull would have its throat slit with a knife, but now a man would also be killed, from a clan designated for this purpose by law. His head would be tightly bound with a cloth, to stop him abusing or cursing the king, and he was laid on the ground and killed with a spear-thrust. When a king died a slave would also be killed at his funeral, to serve him in the hereafter.[6]

Many sacrifices were specifically made to Yero, who was evidently the supreme god of the Kafa people, Bieber's fantasies about 'Heqo' notwithstanding. The adherents of the *eqo* cult would sacrifice to Yero once a year, and Christians and Muslims would identify him with their God. He was seen as good and strong, the creator of everything and present in the world. Kafa Christians would sacrifice animals, usually cattle but sometimes sheep, to Yero, early in the morning of the feast-day of the saint to whom their church was dedicated. Like the Amhara, they also venerated Mary, St George and the archangel Michael.[7]

The Kafa also practised the circumcision of males and females, the former at the age of eight weeks and the latter between the ages of four months and one year. Uncircumcised children were not seen as people at all, and their bodies would not be buried, but exposed in the wilderness or hung on trees to be eaten by vultures. Kafa men were sometimes polygamous, sometimes

monogamous. A wedding involved a mock abduction of the bride, performed by the groom in the evening, at her home.[8]

Bieber's picture of Kafa kingship has been greatly improved upon by the Frankfurt researcher Dieter Onneken, in a doctoral thesis produced in 1956. According to Onneken the Kafa king was indeed invisible to everyone except his closest entourage, and would receive visitors from behind a curtain. He would speak quietly, so that only his most trusted servants could hear him. The king was not allowed to apply his hands to any activity other than wielding arms. He always had to wear a gold bracelet on his right arm, a gold ring on one of his fingers, gold earrings and green clothing.[9]

Mohammed Hassen, in his history of the Oromo, gives us more information about Kafa kings: they were not allowed to walk on the ground, and so cotton cloth had to be spread in front of them, and they could not touch their food, so that other people had to feed them. Their state was a reservoir of slaves for their neighbours. Here, more than anywhere else, the poor volunteered to become slaves, because of heavy taxation. Like other kings in the region, the Kafa king would impose slavery on the family of any political opponent.[10]

Straube: A General Survey of the Omotic-Speaking Peoples

In 1963 the Frankfurt anthropologist Helmut Straube, who was, like Haberland, a member of the Frobenius Institute's expeditions to Ethiopia, published a long account of his investigations into the Omotic-speaking peoples there. It contains a wealth of information about the Amarro people to the east of the southern Ethiopian lakes, the peoples of the Gamo mountain range to the west of the lakes and the extraordinary Janjero people to their north. Here we shall follow the order of Straube's description.

The Amarro inhabit a mountain-range, where there is a 'great' rainy season from April to August and a 'small' one from September to November. They are essentially agriculturalists, with small quantities of livestock. Their culture has three distinctive elements: first, the use of stone in terraces, the foundations of huts, the paving of paths, tombs and symbols of prestige; secondly, the

division of the tribe into two exogamous classes, seen as 'right' and 'left'; thirdly, kingship. Both exogamy and kingship are strongly rooted in myth. We are told that the sky-god, Wonto, created the first pair of humans by a stream: the man, who was called Atso ('Man') on the right bank and the woman, Mawa, on the left. They gave birth to a son and a daughter, whose descendants were divided by Atso into the two exogamous marriage-classes. Straube points to a similar myth among the Nuer people of the Sudan, who belong to the Nilotic language-family. Their first father is supposed to have cut a bull into two lengthways and to have given the right side to one marriage-class and the left to the other. Now among the Amarro, when a man dies and is buried an animal is sacrificed: one side of it is skinned by the man's son and the other by his son-in-law, who evidently has to belong to the other marriage-class, and the flesh is divided in the same way between their respective families. As Straube observes, a two-class marriage-system of this kind is found among many Nilotic-speaking peoples and may well have come from them to Omotic and Kushitic speakers.[11]

As regards kingship, Amarro myth relates that their first king was born to a girl who was made pregnant by the sun (for the sun to be male is of course unusual in the Afroasiatic linguistic domain). The future king was born holding 'a cow's tail, human and sheep's hairs, grains of barley, cabbage-seed and ensete-leaves'. To this day the Amarro still believe that when a king dies he can be succeeded only by a son of his who has been born holding the same objects. As elsewhere, the rule of the Amarro kings was ended by the Amhara in the late nineteenth century, but their family is still venerated and kings have continued to be enthroned. The king has the usual insignia: the gold bracelet and the *kalaca*. Traditionally his hair and fingernails could not be cut, and his hut could not have a fire, since fire was not something into which he was allowed to look. As among the Kafa, cloth had to be spread on the ground to stop his feet touching it. He also had to ride a mule, while his entourage shielded him from the eyes of his subjects.[12]

Human sacrifice has continued to be practised at the new king's enthronement. The victim has to be a strong youth with no physical blemish, and is always, by tradition, supplied by one

particular clan. He is sacrificed at the stream beside which the first human pair were created. The youth is laid, bound, upon the ground, and the successor to the throne has to kill him with the special royal spear, while keeping his back to the victim so that he does not see him. Meanwhile the victim is carefully watched by the Amarro dignitaries, in case he bites his tongue or lips: if he does they have to wipe away the blood, which, if unchecked, would nullify the successor's claim to the throne and bring disaster to the country. The new king now takes a new name (like the kings of other Omotic-speakers). His victim is buried not in his clan's cemetery, but at an unknown spot.[13]

Apart from the king, each of the Amarro's eighty-one clans has a leader whose most important function is to perform an annual sacrifice (at what point in the course of the year we are not told). In front of his hut there is a menhir and a tall bundle of bamboo poles. Beneath the latter the leader, wearing his *kalaca* round his neck, sacrifices a ewe. The blood is smeared on men's foreheads, the menhir and the bamboo poles, and is sprinkled in the direction of the clan's cemetery. Some drops are thrown towards the sky, and the sky-god is asked for protection and assistance. More blood is smeared on the hut's lintel, doorposts and central pillar. The next day, in the twilight before dawn, a man goes to the nearest stream to draw water, which the leader mixes with the contents of the ewe's stomach and sprinkles over the whole clan. It is stressed by the Amarro that the water has to be drawn before daybreak, 'before a bird has drunk from the stream'. Normally it is forbidden for men to fetch water. Finally, a ram is slaughtered and eaten.[14]

The most important Amarro festival, however, is the Feast of the Cross, which is celebrated not in September but in January. Straube thinks that this feast, as elsewhere in Ethiopia, is an ancient spring festival taken over by Christianity. Each of the nineteen Amarro districts celebrates the feast separately. The feast begins before dawn and is characterised by the usual bonfire. On the next day, at dawn, each man goes to the ashes, smears some on his forehead and takes some more to put on his hut's central pillar. The head of each family slaughters a bull or a ram, and the same pillar is smeared with its blood. Two weeks of singing, dancing, eating and drinking ensue. It is only in this feast that the king is allowed to look at a fire.[15]

After the Amarro Straube turns to the peoples of the Gamo mountain range. Here the climate is much the same as for the Amarro: rain falls from March to October, most strongly in July and August. Straube concentrates his attention on the Dorze people, who, like the Amarro, cultivate the ensete plant, but are mainly weavers. Since much of his study has been superseded by later fieldwork we shall examine only his presentation of the linked topics of life-cycle rituals and the Feast of the Cross.

Among the Dorze the circumcision of adults is practised among the 'old clans' who have always lived in this area, while the circumcision of children is practised among the three Amharic immigrant clans who came from northern Ethiopia. Only circumcised people can be buried. Men are generally circumcised between thirty and forty. The operation is done every third year, about two months before the Feast of the Cross, and afterwards the men stay in their huts until the festival, while their wounds heal. At the start of the feast they come out and perform a public circling of the marketplace, with butter in their hair. While the wounds are healing the relatives of each man hunt a bird (the species does not matter) and then whirl it round his head three times before throwing it away. The Feast of the Cross itself is celebrated from the 15–17 September. On the first day huge quantities of cattle are slaughtered. The next day games are held: races and fighting (with blunt spears) on foot and horseback. This goes on throughout the afternoon until dusk. In the night all the men go to the bonfire and, as it burns, pray for the prosperity of the crops, increase in the number of cattle and general well-being. About fourteen days later the entire festival is repeated on a smaller scale.[16]

The Dorze also link weddings to the Feast of the Cross. Preliminary arrangements begin three weeks before. The bride, who is unaware of these, is sent to buy grain in the company of two old women, who duly rendezvous with the groom's friends. Then she is dressed in festive clothes, has her face covered and is carried to the homestead of the groom's father, who has built a hut for the young couple to live in. Here she lives in strict seclusion until the feast, in a dark room at the back. She is not allowed to touch her food with her hands. (The same restrictions apply to a woman who has just given birth.) After she has entered the room

the groom holds a small party just outside, with friends, neighbours and musicians. The bride's seclusion ends three days before the feast, when she and the groom go to her parents' home. There the groom falls on his knees at the entrance of their hut and makes his way, on a layer of ensete leaves, to his new parents-in-law, whose knees he kisses. They and the young couple have a meal together and then go to the marketplace, where they join the groom's parents. The bride and groom, accompanied by their parents and friends, perform a ceremonial circling of the marketplace: this circling is both the high point and the culmination of the ceremonies.[17]

Straube's survey ends with a study of the remarkable Janjero people, who live to the north of the southern Ethiopian lakes, in an area which is partly low-lying, partly mountainous. Here the climate is similar to what we have found elsewhere in this region: the rainy season lasts from mid-April to October, with the heaviest rainfall in July and August. The country had a long tradition of kingship and independence until it was conquered by the Amhara in 1894. The Janjero live off ensete, barley and wheat, and possess little in the way of livestock.[18]

Before 1894 the Janjero king was seen as being identical with both the sun and the moon, and consequently was not allowed to leave his palaces by day or during a moonlit night. He had the sun and moon portrayed on his standard. In the September festival corresponding to the Feast of the Cross he adorned his hair with the white tail-feathers of a bird called the *gusewa*, which were reserved for him alone. The king also had special royal drums, which were re-covered every four years in a ceremony closed by the sacrifice of a man. A new king had to go through rituals found in other African monarchies. On the death of the previous king one of his sons was selected by the state council and forced to undergo a period of eight days' seclusion in the forest. If he had not already been circumcised this was now done. It was believed that he was now visited by a python, lions and leopards. On the ninth day he bathed in a spring, and, it was believed, a swarm of bees settled on his head. A gold bracelet was put on his right arm. Then he had to step four times over a girl lying on the ground, each time placing a foot on her neck. After this he was carried to the house of one of the court dignitaries. On the way

he was joined by his wife (prior to his accession he would have only one), and a bull was sacrificed: the new queen was smeared with its blood. The next day the ceremonies were ended by a human sacrifice in the king's presence and further sacrifices of humans and bulls on two mountains and at another spring. These sacrifices were intended to ensure the fertility of humans, animals and plants.[19]

As for the dead Janjero king, he was buried in a small forest. His coffin was placed vertically in a round pit, on top of a living virgin girl, who was taken, in alternation, from one of two specific clans. She was wrapped in cotton cloths and laid on the bottom of the grave. More cotton cloths were used to fill the space between the coffin and the walls of the grave, the mouth of which was closed with wooden planks. A vast number of cattle were slaughtered at the grave. On the next day there was a mock burial at the cemetery of the king's clan: a beehive was buried there instead of the corpse.[20]

The religious life of the Janjero was always centred around the king, and the sky-god, Hao, was generally neglected. Once a year the king would pray to this god, who was supposed to rain gold down on him. He would also sacrifice once a year to the sun and the moon. The sacrifice to the sun was performed by the king before dawn: he would slit the throats of a white bull and a white ram. As for the sacrifice to the moon, this was done after dusk, with a reddish-brown sheep and a black bull. At the harvest festival the king took part in a ceremony with the second of his 'chief wives', whom he had to marry in the year following his accession. They gave food prepared from the harvest-fruits to a priest, who threw it beneath a couple of trees, saying, 'This is for the king, this is for the queen.' Then the royal couple walked past each other in opposite directions four times, while the leader of one clan stood in the middle, using his spear to direct them like a traffic policeman.[21]

Unless a king died and a new one took his place, only one human sacrifice was performed in a year, according to Straube's informants, although older European sources state otherwise. A man was selected from one of five clans, who provided victims in rotation. He was usually old and single, but had to be perfectly sound in body. Bound to a tree, he was killed with a royal spear,

rammed into his neck. This was done on behalf of the king by any male subject who was able to obtain his permission: the executioner obtained great prestige. There were four special places where this sacrifice was performed in rotation. Straube observes that according to European sources dating from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries more human sacrifices were performed, generally of children or old men. The bodies were not buried, but thrown to the vultures and hyenas. These sacrifices were made to the sky-god, in order to strengthen the king.[22]

The Janjero, according to Straube, believe that there is an enormous snake living inside one of their mountains, who is somehow connected with the creation of the world. They believe that he causes earthquakes, and when these occur they try to propitiate him. They also have a cult of the crocodiles in the Omo river, which are apparently seen as a manifestation of the sky-god. The Janjero further believe that this god once placed an iron pillar in their territory, joining heaven and earth. A king cut this down, but its stump remained. Apparently a pillar identified with this stump had sacrifices made next to it up to the Amharic conquest. Every year the king came to it in November, and a bull was sacrificed.[23]

In September there was a festival corresponding to the Feast of the Cross. In the twelve days leading up to the festival cattle were sacrificed in the presence of the king and the first of his 'chief wives'. On the twelfth day, after dusk, the king himself sacrificed a bull, circled the main bonfire four times with his family and set it alight. The next day, accompanied by a number of dignitaries on horseback, he galloped four times round the ashes. Feasting continued for two weeks. In the ensuing dry season all religious and political activities, weddings and hunting-expeditions had to be initiated and concluded. During the rainy season the king and the priests could not have sexual intercourse. The king's death was supposed to happen at the end of a dry season. It was believed that the fourth, eighth and fourteenth days of the month were unlucky for work (which was suspended), but suitable for sacrifices.[24]

The Janjero also had two extraordinary initiation-rituals for young males: the cutting off of nipples and the extirpation of one testicle. As for the former, it was done so that the males should

not resemble females. The operation was usually performed when they were about ten years old, although no specific age was laid down. It had to be done before circumcision, and always took place in October. As for the extirpation of the left testicle, it was apparently done to all males except the king and his sons. All early travellers tell of this custom, but Straube's informants spoke only of an incision in the scrotum, performed at the same time as circumcision, which was previously done at the age of twenty. The custom is attested among some southern African peoples. Circumcision itself was always done on a Thursday in April, as the last ritual act before the start of the rainy season. It was, however, done on successive Thursdays in different areas. The men circumcised would spend the following half-year secluded together in roughly-built huts made of leafy branches. After their wounds had healed they engaged in a ceremonial hunt and killed a mouse or bird. During their seclusion they engaged in competitive games and mock battles. Circumcision gave the man the right to marry. This is done largely at the bride's home: the groom comes there with his father and friends and is blessed, together with the bride, by the latter's father. Then she is taken to the homestead of the groom's father and he in turn blesses the couple.[25]

Haberland: An Overview of Ethiopian Kingship

In 1965 Haberland published a book called *Investigations into Ethiopian Kingship (Untersuchungen zum äthiopischen Königtum)*. This draws on literary and historical sources, the work of other anthropologists and Haberland's own extensive conversations with the grandson of the last king to reign over the Wolamo people, Omotic-speakers who live in between the Dorze and the Janjero. The book deals mainly with kingship among the Semitic-speakers of the northern highlands of Ethiopia, but is nonetheless of great importance for our purposes.

Haberland takes the view that kingship in Africa ultimately stems from Near Eastern influences, but is much older than has been thought by scholars who saw Ethiopian kingship as coming from Egypt or southern Arabia. Kingship in Ethiopia, whether northern or southern, is essentially African. Thus its main symbol

is the ring, whether bracelet, finger-ring or earring, whereas the crown is usually absent. As elsewhere in Africa, the king is connected with bees, who are supposed to choose him to rule and whose honey and wax are reserved for him alone. The king is credited with the power to make rain fall, to make the country fertile and to part the waters of the rivers. His court is sacrosanct, and in it only he can engage in sexual intercourse and ritual slaughter. Consequently, his retainers are controlled by a vast number of taboos. It appears that even at the funerals of Christian kings human beings were killed to act as servants in the hereafter.[26]

More specific information is presented in Haberland's chapter on kingship among the Wolamo. This is based on information given to him in 1955 by the grandson of the king reigning before the Amharic conquest in 1894, and also by various members of the king's clan, the *tigre*. The latter originally belonged to a northern Ethiopian people and conquered the Wolamo around 1600. They were supposed to be descended 'from the sun and the moon'. Owing to their northern origin they did not usually maintain the archaic character of southern Ethiopian kingship, but some traditional features were preserved. The kings would sacrifice when there was either too little or too much rain, offering black and white animals respectively. Once a year the king performed a special state sacrifice 'for the country of Wolamo' on a holy mountain. He alone had the right to kill human beings or order their execution. The king also had the right to all trophies won by hunters, and only he and his clan had the right to drink mead.[27]

After this Haberland proceeds to make general observations about southern Ethiopian kingship. The first king is supposed, in the myths, to be of supernatural origin: he has fallen from the sky, or is the child of the sun or a snake. In order to succeed to the throne a candidate must have no physical blemish. Lions, snakes and hyenas come to his house at night and sleep at his feet. A swarm of bees descends upon his head to designate him as the future sovereign. Alternatively, he may be required to climb a rock smeared with fat, or to throw a grain of corn into the air, with the result that as it falls it changes into a huge stack of grain! After mounting the throne the king does not actually have to do anything: his mere existence is supposed to make his people

prosperous. If insufficient rain falls, then the king is deposed. When a king dies a long period of inactivity ensues. Sometimes, a young girl is buried with him 'as if she were his wife'. In other cases, in the past, slaves would be buried with the ruler: in the Wolamo's country one would be seated at his feet, to hold his pipe, and another at his head, with mead and food.[28]

Sperber: A Re-Evaluation of the Dorze

The year 1974 saw the publication of an article on the Dorze by the Paris-based anthropologist Dan Sperber, representing the result of fieldwork conducted from 1969 to 1971. This contribution also reflects the work of other anthropologists in the Gamo highlands, and renders some of Straube's earlier study of the Dorze obsolete. In his article, 'The notion of seniority and its paradoxes among the Dorze of southern Ethiopia', Sperber points out that the Dorze have two types of social classification and organisation: one based on the idea of seniority and the other on democracy. The former is represented by a sort of hereditary 'king', the *ka'o*, while the latter is represented by dignitaries called *halakas*, who are nominated by the assemblies of the fourteen Dorze districts. To render the idea of 'senior' the Dorze use the word *baira*, which is employed not just in the domain of kinship but to describe species of animals and plants. Although in practice men become dignitaries by virtue of being eldest sons, in theory all men can become dignitaries by virtue of wealth and merit, and the concept of seniority is not applied by the Dorze in this context. Sperber naturally asks what *baira* really means. Clans and districts claim to be *baira* for various reasons of prestige. The lion, the leopard and the elephant also have merits which give them claims to be called *baira*. Barley and wheat have conflicting claims because of their use in ritual. The rays of the sun are *baira*, 'senior', to the sun itself, and it is to them alone that sacrifices are made. *Baira* is also a title borne by the most senior male of a clan, who sacrifices on its behalf. In this respect the 'king' is most *baira* of all, as the representative of the whole Dorze territory.[29]

The 'dignitaries' or *halakas* have to be full citizens, circumcised, married, rich and free from moral defects. They have to spend a lot of their wealth on feasts during their period of office, which

may last months or years. This period of office resembles that of a 'generation-class' among the Oromo: it is marked by transition-rituals, taboos and sacrifices, and also by the opposition between different generations. One cannot become a *halaka* before one's father or eldest brother. However, as Sperber has already noted, the notion of *baira* is not applied here, but rather in the domain of monarchy and genealogy; the *halakas* belong to the domain of assemblies and democracy. The first domain is protected by taboos, the second by the threat of ostracism.[30]

This last conclusion of Sperber's is contradicted by the observations of the American anthropologist Judith Olmstead, who also did fieldwork among the Dorze from 1969 to 1971. She notes that if a *halaka* stumbles and falls he has to be replaced at once, and that if his wife dies he has to remarry on the very same day or resign. So his domain is indeed protected by taboos. Moreover, the *halaka* seems to belong less to the domain of democracy than to that of fertility (to which the concept of *baira* also belongs, as we shall see): he is replaced if there is bad weather or an epidemic, but kept on for a second term if his first one is attended by prosperity.[31]

Furthermore, the idea that the *ka'o* is a 'king' has been disproved by the French anthropologist Jacques Bureau, who did his fieldwork in the Gamo mountains in 1973–74 and published the results in 1981. He showed that the *ka'o* is essentially a leading sacrificer: there is no monarchy in the Gamo societies and in some of them there are several *ka'os*. These are indeed prestigious, but would be better compared to the priests (*qallus*) of the Oromo.[32]

Haberland, Strecker and Lydall: Reconsiderations of Omotic Culture

In 1986 a symposium on Kushitic and Omotic languages was held at Cologne. It was opened by Haberland, who gave a short paper on 'archaic' Omotic-speaking peoples distinguished by their external appearance, undeveloped culture and linguistic particularities. Linguistically they do not belong to the two main sub-families of Omotic, namely Kafa and Ometo (the latter includes Dorze and Wolamo). These people are noteworthy for having had no knowledge of cotton or weaving before 1900. Until

then they were also ignorant of the vast number of useful plants cultivated in northern Ethiopia, along with the whole Ethiopian culture of heroes on horseback, rank, goldsmithry and so on.[33]

The German anthropologist Ivo Strecker delivered a paper which was sharply critical of the work done by Haberland and his colleagues in the Frobenius Institute's expeditions of the 1950s. His contribution was based on fieldwork conducted from 1970 to 1983 among the Hamar, an 'archaic' people who are the southernmost of all Omotic-speakers. Strecker's paper concentrated on the word *barjo*, which generally means a state of well-being or good luck. The Hamar have an institution known as 'calling *barjo*', which consists of chanting phrases like:

> The rain will fall
> The children will play
> The plants will smell good ...

One of Haberland's colleagues, Adolf Jensen, mistakenly imagined that here *barjo* meant 'God'. He committed the same error when studying a closely related people, the Banna, who instead of *barjo* say *bairo* – an alternative form also used by the Hamar, which is evidently a variant of the Dorze term *baira*, taken by Sperber to mean 'senior'. Jensen thought that *bairo* meant 'God' as well. Moreover, when Jensen visited another people in this area, the Ari, he thought that they had a pair of gods called Barri and Sabi, even though the Ari told him that these words meant the same thing. He was followed by Haberland, writing about yet another related people, the Ubamer: he thought that they had a sky-god called Sabi and an earth-goddess called Berri. Apparently the members of the Frobenius Institute's expeditions were trying to find a 'divine pair', in order to attack the theory of a generally prevalent monotheism, allegedly prevalent among most so-called 'primitive' peoples. This theory was put forward by another German anthropologist, the Catholic priest Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954).[34]

Now according to Strecker the Hamar use the term *sabe*, which taken literally just means the Milky Way, in a metaphorical manner to mean a variety of things, notably abundance. This is because the Milky Way represents the essence of spottedness, being more 'spotted' with stars than the rest of the sky. Thus this word is

often a metaphor for *barjo*. The latter can mean the spoken word which brings good luck, or it can mean 'senior, important', when applied to people. Animals can have *barjo*, and the word can be applied to plants, cow hides, places, water and parts of the body. As for a Hamar 'God', he did not exist.[35]

Strecker's wife and co-researcher, Jean Lydall, presented fascinating data about gender in the Hamar language. She points out that outside the Afroasiatic domain, in Nilo-Saharan languages, gender is not usually marked. In Afroasiatic languages, however, the masculine and feminine genders are distinguished, and as a rule the former designates what is 'big, strong and important', and the latter the opposite, or what is passive. In Hamar, oddly, the masculine gender is employed for what is trivial, and the female gender for what is of major importance. This, argues Lydall, is because in Hamar society men are seen as initiating and determining activities, but women actually carry them out and give substance to them. So male contributions are perceived as small-scale and few in number, while female contributions are viewed as large-scale and plentiful.[36]

Afroasiatic Parallels

Many elements enumerated in this chapter echo what we have found before. Some aspects of the religions of Omotic-speakers are also characteristic of Oromo religion, in particular the phallic head-ornament (*kalaca*) and the preservation of indigenous rituals under the cover of the Feast of the Cross. The Kafa king, dressed in a green cloak when going to sacrifice by rivers in the wilderness, evokes Daum's picture of South Arabian ceremonies in wadis. Omotic-speakers' human sacrifices also look Afroasiatic. The custom of sending servants on to wait on their royal masters in the afterlife is attested in ancient Egypt.[37] Having a human sacrifice at the start of a new reign is something that we have already encountered in the Canary Islands, and is echoed in the Hausa practice of sacrificing human beings when a new city is founded. Nevertheless, when one examines each Omotic-speaking people in turn they pose considerable problems for the comparatist.

Among the Kafa Yero is presumably the storm-god of the Afroasiatic domain, since he is the supreme god, identified with

the God of Christianity and Islam, and the seasons, distinguished by the presence or absence of thunderstorms, are seen as his 'gifts'. One might be tempted to speculate that the veneration accorded to Mary and St George could reflect the worship of the ancient Semitic sun-goddess and the young god who kills a demon, but it must be said that here the evidence is lacking. However, the importance given by the Kafa to circumcision looks Afroasiatic: for the Kafa uncircumcised children are not even people. It is also noteworthy that the Kafa's celebration of the Feast of the Cross comes at the transition from a very wet period, with rain falling every day, mostly in thunderstorms: thus it corresponds, in Daum's perspective, to a Proto-Semitic spring festival. As among the Oromo, the feast has a celebration of previous killings, linked to virility. In Kafa weddings the groom's abduction of the bride, at her home and in the evening, is reminiscent of Yemeni uxorilocal weddings.

The Amarro evidence is also problematic. Here the dual organisation looks Afroasiatic, but may be Nilotic in origin. The annual sacrifice of a ewe resembles Semitic practice: not only do we find a holy stone and poles, but also the smearing of blood on the lintel and doorposts, as in the Passover. Moreover, there must be some significance in the Amarro's insistence that daybreak must not come before water is fetched to conclude the business of disposing of the ewe: this looks like the Passover, with its insistence on completely disposing of the animal eaten in the night. The veneration of the hut's central pillar is seen also among the Borana.

As for adult circumcision among the Dorze, it is noteworthy that this is confined to the 'old clans': yet again, it looks archaic and Afroasiatic. Significantly, it is linked to the Feast of the Cross and a ritual hunt (which, like that of the South Arabian ibex, is not done for meat). Thus one sees a connection with weddings: the Dorze hold this at the feast itself, and the Arabian hunt, as we have seen, has a wedding-procession. The Dorze celebration of the feast resembles the ancient Arabian spring festival: both the Dorze and the Meccans have mock battles. It also resembles the Passover in having a ritual during the night, when the Dorze go to pray at the bonfire (which itself may parallel the Passover's insistence on destroying the animal's uneaten meat by fire). The

Dorze marriage-ceremony has a 'uxorilocal' ritual: the groom goes to the bride's home and kisses her parents' knees.

Among the Janjero the worship of the sun and moon looks typically Afroasiatic: white victims are offered to the sun before dawn, and a reddish-brown sheep and a black bull to the moon after dusk – suggesting the usual Afroasiatic red warrior moon-god and the 'black god' whom he kills in the night. However, explicit manifestations of these gods continue to elude us. It is noteworthy that when a new Janjero king steps four times over a girl he puts a foot on her neck: this surely represents killing or annihilating an enemy and the sexual act itself, seen, as among the Oromo, as identical. Thus it is with his second wife, the one married after his accession, that he goes through the fertility-rituals of the harvest festival: they walk past each other four times, again representing the sexual act in a 'sacred marriage'. Here the two trees, corresponding to the royal pair, are also typical of what we have found elsewhere in the Afroasiatic field. The Janjero cult of the crocodile, symbolising the 'black god', reflects what we have seen in Egypt, where it symbolises Seth. Furthermore the Janjero divine snake, connected with the creation of the world, resembles the snakes which we have encountered among the Hausa and the Oromo.

A further element worthy of attention is the Janjero king's celebration of the Feast of the Cross. After dusk he sacrifices a bull (the Passover sacrifice takes place at dusk), circles the bonfire four times, and sets it alight; the next day he circles its ashes four times. Again, this is after a period of heavy rainfall. The Kafa men, one notes, boast of their killings just after the bonfire is lit, presenting the penises of their dead enemies. Now with the Oromo we find that men and boys come to the ashes and those men who have killed big game thrust their spears at the remains of saplings (symbols of masculinity), while boasting of killing lesser animals: evidently these rituals are closely connected and, while differing, express the same logic. A similar logic is also expressed in the Janjero taboos surrounding the dry and rainy seasons, the former being reserved for male activities such as politics and hunting, just as for the Kabyles the dry season is 'male'. Of special interest is the Janjero ceremonial hunt of a mouse or bird after circumcision has taken place: this, like the Dorze hunt, corresponds to the

Arabian one and the symbolic hunting performed by the Hausa, with no real aim of acquiring meat. Yet again, circumcision is connected to marriage, which has a largely uxorilocal ceremony.

Another aspect of kingship among Omotic-speakers is the linking of the king to bees. This is also found in ancient Egypt, but is so widespread in Africa that one must doubt its 'Afroasiatic' character.[38] One must also be wary of jumping to conclusions about the supposed descent from the sun and moon of the royal clan of the Wolamo: this clan came from a Semitic-speaking people. On the other hand the Dorze opposition of the hereditary chief sacrificers and democratically elected 'dignitaries' is a good example of the general opposition, seen by Haberland as Afroasiatic, of hereditary high priests and elected political leaders. However, one may doubt the Omotic origin of the word *barjo*, which Strecker takes to mean, among other things, 'good luck'. It resembles the Arabic and Islamic term *baraka*, 'blessing', 'life-increasing force'. A related Christian Amharic word for 'blessing', *barkito*, is used by the Kafa.[39]

At the end of the last chapter we noted that linguists have suspected Omotic of being related more closely to the Egyptian and Chadic branches of Afroasiatic than to the Semitic, Kushitic and Berber sub-family. This view finds some support in the religious evidence: kingship is of course especially prominent in Egypt, Omotic Ethiopia and among the Hausa, and the king enters into a 'sacred marriage'. Thus the marriage of Horus and Hathor is combined with the annual royal celebration of Horus' reign at Edfu; the new Janjero king's queen is smeared with the blood of a sacrificed bull when she joins her husband; and the Hausa chief of the Gobir region, when enthroned, has two wives given to him, both of them symbolising the country of which he is the husband and representing it in a wedding-ceremony at his coronation. In this perspective one would see some similarities between Omotic religion on the one hand and Semitic and Kushitic religion on the other as due to late influences (as in the case of the *kalaca*, which looks like a borrowed element rather than part of a common inheritance). However, some linguists have seen Omotic as breaking away from the original Afroasiatic group of dialects well before the other branches, and thus being comparatively dissimilar to them.[40] This second view would also

have support in the religious evidence: we have not succeeded in finding a clear Omotic representation of the usual Afroasiatic black god, warrior-deity and sun-goddess.

Conclusions

In this concluding section I intend to address a number of questions. What is the essential nature of the Afroasiatic religious heritage, and how does it differ from what is Indo-European or inner African? What influence did it exert upon ancient Iran and Greece? To what extent is it present in the Bible, Christianity and Islam? How much is it still with us in modern Western thought?

These questions naturally lead us to others. Throughout the Afroasiatic domain we have constantly seen strong evidence of dualism or bipolarity. But what do these words 'dualism' and 'bipolarity' mean? And do they represent universal modes of social organisation or permanent structures within the human mind? Or do they simply represent fantasies dreamt up by modern scholars?

Dualism and Bipolarity

The word 'dualism' seems to have been first employed at the end of the seventeenth century. It was used in a religious context, to designate the belief of people who allegedly maintained that both God and the Devil had always existed independently, or, in other words, that there were two eternal gods, one good and one bad. Later the term was also applied in philosophy, to refer to systems containing two irreducible elements, such as matter and spirit.[1] However, in sociology and anthropology it has been used in a much wider sense. To begin with, social scientists found 'dualism' in the division of many societies into halves or 'moieties', with the obligation for everyone to belong to one of the two – and, often, to find a spouse in the other. More recently, anthropologists have moved on to the view that moieties are not particularly important, and that 'dualism' is to be found instead in a universal structure

of the human mind: a tendency to think in twos exists everywhere, and is sometimes reflected in social organisation.[2]

Here anthropologists often use 'dualism' interchangeably with 'polarity'. Strictly speaking, this is not entirely appropriate. 'Polarity' was first used in the middle of the seventeenth century, to mean 'the quality of possessing magnetic poles'. The word has been employed generally by writers in English from the nineteenth century to mean the possession of 'two opposite or contrasted aspects, principles or tendencies'.[3] 'Bipolarity' is evidently synonymous with 'polarity': I prefer the former because the prefix 'bi-', which many would find redundant, serves to underline the 'twoness' of Afroasiatic thought.

The Principal Characteristics of the Afroasiatic Religious Heritage

This 'twoness', manifested above all in the male–female opposition, goes together with an overriding emphasis on fertility to provide the kernel of the Afroasiatic religious heritage. The contrast between the dry and the wet goes together with that between light and darkness. Also dualistic – and primary – is the opposition between successive generations. It is only after these dichotomies that Afroasiatic logic goes on to produce its triads. Thus, after the original schema of a black storm-god and a maiden offered to him, we encounter the intervention of the young hero, turning a pair into a trio. Accordingly, after the primary juxtaposition of black and white, one finds the red of the youthful warrior and the blood which he sheds. This bloodshed is re-enacted in sacrifice and circumcision. As we have seen, among Afroasiatic-speakers the most important sacrifice is that of a black bull, who represents the old storm-god. When this sacrifice is performed by a young Oromo warrior he attains true adulthood and becomes ready to be a father, while his own father is excluded from the ceremony. Circumcision, another important aspect of the Afroasiatic religious inheritance, also corresponds to the killing of the storm-god, as Daum has shown in his analysis of Semitic materials: the waving of a sword by the Yemeni boy being circumcised represents the killing of the water-demon, as does the symbolic circumcision of Moses when God tries to kill him in Exodus 4: 24–6. Both sacrifice

and circumcision precede weddings which symbolise the union of a moon-god and a sun-goddess and the establishing of a new bipolar relationship in the place of an old one. Here, then, is the necessary logic which guarantees the supply of water for crops, livestock and the perpetuation of humankind.

The Afroasiatic and Indo–European Legacies

Indo–European-speakers, by contrast, have tended first of all to express themselves in tripartite formulations. This is agreed even by opponents of Dumézil, some of whom also agree more or less with his threefold schema for the interpretation of Indo–European thought, consisting, as we have seen, of (1) religious sovereignty (which he divided into magical and legal aspects); (2) physical force (especially that of the warrior); and (3) fertility. I myself have gone further and argued that all three of these concepts are reflected within each of the three as sub-concepts, giving the following table:

1. religious sovereignty (including reason, intelligence and education)
   - 1.1 sovereignty within sovereignty
     - 1.1a the magical, arbitrary and terrifying aspect of sovereignty within sovereignty
     - 1.1b the legal, contractual and familiar aspect of sovereignty within sovereignty
   - 1.2 force within sovereignty: the protection of the community's solidarity and continuity, notably by its young armed force
   - 1.3 fertility within sovereignty: the distribution of goods

2. physical force (including anger)
   - 2.1 sovereignty within force: either the warrior's intelligence, allied with speed, or his respect for religious sovereignty
   - 2.2 force within force: either the warrior's brute force or his respect for its proper use
   - 2.3 fertility within force: the warrior's respect for fertility

3. fertility (including desire, wealth, beauty and medicine)
   3.1 sovereignty within fertility: prophecy
   3.2 force within fertility: archery, horse-breeding
   3.3 fertility within fertility: luxury, pacificness, music and cattle-breeding

It will be seen from this table that the bipolarity which Dumézil found in Indo-European sovereignty, dividing it into magical and legal aspects, is in my modification of his schema not even secondary, but only tertiary.[4]

Dumézil's tripartite schema is seen by him and his followers to be reflected in a series of three colours: religious sovereignty is represented by the colour white, the force of the warrior by red and fertility by a 'dark' colour, which could be black, blue or green. This symbolism is of course mainly different from that of the Afroasiatic colour-schema of black, red and white, representing the storm-god, the warrior who kills him and the sun-goddess. However, the common range of colours may reflect an inheritance shared by the two language-families. What is significant for our purposes is that Indo-European logic requires the perpetuation of the triad of concepts: the social class which incarnates religious sovereignty (priests or intellectuals) must use the warrior-class to dominate and exploit producers of food. This logic is found in the Indo-Iranian caste system, the politics of the celebrated Athenian philosopher Plato (428–347 BCE) and the 'three orders' of medieval Europe. All this is alien to the Afroasiatic domain.[5]

Inner African Parallels

It is comparatively easy to distinguish between the Indo-European and Afroasiatic legacies. But it is extremely difficult to distinguish between what is Afroasiatic and what is inner African. In Africa one has to note the Nilo-Saharan language-family, with speakers scattered from Mali to Ethiopia, and, most extensively, the language-family of Niger-Congo speakers, who are spread over the west and the south of the continent. Trying to isolate the cultural characteristics which separate speakers of these language-families from Afroasiatic-speakers is an enormous and perhaps impossible task, bedevilled by the influence on previous researchers

of discredited racial theories, which, in imaginary reconstructions, have opposed 'white' Afroasiatic conquerors to 'negro' underdogs. Here I shall just briefly mention similarities between Afroasiatic and three inner African religions which have been the objects of important studies.

We have already seen the parallels which have been observed between Egyptian religion and the religion of the Dogon people of Mali, who speak a Niger–Congo language. From 1931 onwards the Dogon have been studied in great detail by the leading French anthropologist Marcel Griaule (1898–1956) and his followers. The results of their research have been conveniently summarised by Geneviève Calame-Griaule. Dogon religion has one God, who, to begin with, created two male twins. One of these, Yurugu, rebelled and had to be turned into a fox, the enemy of light, water and fertility. We shall naturally compare Yurugu with the Egyptian god Seth, who is also a rebel, alarmingly dangerous, full of dark aspects, symbolised by a quadruped, hostile to the water-supply and infertile. The other twin, Nommo, was sacrificed and resuscitated by God in order to mitigate the disorder caused by the fox. Thus the two represent opposite principles: order and disorder, life and death, wetness and dryness. Yurugu, the fox, has had his tongue cut off, but can foretell the future with his paws, and is respected for this, while being otherwise decried as a loner and opponent of group solidarity. We must observe that Yurugu also resembles Seth closely in other ways: he is born by prematurely bursting out of his mother, disturbing an orderly sequence of births of twins, and he is characterised by irregular sexuality (coupling incestuously with his mother).[6]

Another African people whose religion has been the object of important research are the Nuer of southern Sudan, who speak a Nilo–Saharan language. Their religion was studied by Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (1902–73), who published his results in 1956. He tells us that the Nuer God has a hypostasis called *col*, 'dark', the spirit of thunderstorms. Evidently we shall see this spirit, and the sacrifices made to it, as corresponding to the black storm-god of Afroasiatic-speakers and the offerings which he receives from them. Evans-Pritchard says that if one of the Nuer is killed by lightning an ox, preferably black, has to be sacrificed just after the following sunset and its flesh eaten during the night.

It is killed with a spear, as are sheep and goats sacrificed along with it (normally these are sacrificed by cutting the throat). The Nuer also dedicate black cows to the spirit of the Nile. Once, we are told, a maiden was sacrificed to this spirit; now a goat is thrown into the river every year. Evans-Pritchard also tells us that there is an implicit metaphor of light and dark running through Nuer religion, which is pre-eminently dualistic, with a sharp division between the spiritual or immaterial world and the created, material one known to the senses.[7] Here, then, are various elements which we have found in Afroasiatic religions: their origins remain shrouded in mystery.

Finally, we may briefly consider the Fang people of Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon. They speak a Niger–Congo language, and have been the object of a long monograph by James Fernandez, published in 1982. Fernandez takes the view that Fang traditional religion does not have a sharply dualistic view of the universe, but just such a view has been developed by the Fang in the twentieth century, in a new religion called Bwiti, which stresses the male–female opposition. I suspect that this is due to Christian influence. Protestant missionaries, using the Bible, have unintentionally converted the Fang to the religion of the Pentateuch, which they find more congenial, as resembling their own system of taboos and kinship, than that of the New Testament. Not surprisingly, they take the serpent who tempts Adam and Eve to be a part of God, and the first sin to be God's will. Like other African peoples, the Fang are fond of the story of the 'stolen blessing' of Isaac and adapt it to explain their colonial subjugation.[8] Yet again, we are faced with late diffusion from the Semitic field, and cannot point to indubitably Afroasiatic or inner African traditions.

The same may be true of much of the rest of Africa. As Daum has pointed out, the myth of the luminous hero who kills a water-demon and thereby wins a bride is found all over Africa.[9] So too is circumcision, seen as an initiation-rite preceding marriage. The sacrificing of a black bull to obtain rain is also widespread. Throughout Africa water is ardently desired, and thus black and blue are the favourite colours.[10] It would take much more study to isolate specifically Afroasiatic elements in the religions of Nilo–Saharan or Niger–Congo-speakers. Thus it seems best, for the

moment. to conclude that although the religions of Afroasiatic-speakers possess a strong degree of unity they still cannot be differentiated from the religions of speakers of other African language-families.

Iran

While it is difficult to distinguish Afroasiatic influences in Africa, it is, I suggest, easier to spot them in Iran. Here the original inheritance was strongly Indo–European, with a rigid threefold caste system of priests, warriors and agriculturalists. How could this have produced the famous 'dualism' usually associated with Iranian religion? The answer is to be found in influences coming from the west, not just from Semitic religions, but also from the eastern Mediterranean blend of dualistic thought produced by the northern Afroasiatic-speakers generally. At first the Iranians had one supreme god, Ahura Mazda, the 'Wise Lord'. Beneath him there was a Holy Spirit and an Evil Spirit. Only much later was the former identified with Ahura Mazda himself, so as to produce a dualistic system with one good first principle confronting one bad one. This new position seems to have been reached largely as a result of confrontation with other religions, so that the Mazdeans, as the worshippers of Ahura Mazda are called, developed an increasingly dualistic 'Mazdaism' partly because Greeks and other outsiders saw them as dualists. There was a long period of interaction between Mazdeans and Jews, and subsequently also between Mazdeans and Christians, along with competition between Mazdaism and the strongly dualistic religion of Manichaeism. Thus it was probably inter-faith polemic and disputation that forced the Mazdeans into an absolutely unequivocal dualistic position, which was not clearly expressed before the ninth century CE.[11]

Greece

As for the Greeks themselves, it has been argued by Dumézil and his followers that their original heritage was also Indo–European, but they broke away from this with the famous Greek 'cultural miracle', producing philosophy and re-thinking their myths. Might

this miracle not also be due to Afroasiatic influence? It is well-established that early Greek philosophising is strongly marked by bipolarity: the first Greek thinkers thought in terms of opposites such as the hot and the cold, the wet and the dry, the one and the many and so forth.[12] From our standpoint this is probably owing to the 'orientalising revolution' which swept Greece in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE: Greek art was transformed by contact with Afroasiatic-speaking craftsmen on the eastern Mediterranean coasts. This revolution is to be seen in the historical context of Assyrian military and political successes on the Mediterranean seaboard, which led the kings of Greek cities on Cyprus to pay homage to Assyrian rulers. Migrant oriental craftsmen completely changed Greek jewellery and metalwork. The leading Zurich-based classicist Walter Burkert has argued that this is reflected in the Semitic origin of some Greek words, such as *tauros*, 'bull', and *kathairein*, 'purify'. Sacrificing an animal instead of one's own daughter also seems to have been something borrowed by the Greeks from Semitic-speakers. Moreover, the Greek idea that a human consists of two elements, spirit, of divine origin, and matter, is anticipated in ancient Akkadian epic.[13] Thus the Greek obsession with antithesis, which we have seen in Herodotus and Plutarch, is probably itself Afroasiatic in origin. However, with Plato, as we have just noted, Indo-European tripartition returns in all its vigour: the Athenian thinker's ideal state consists of three components, [1] ruling philosophers, [2] professional soldiers and [3] wealth. These components, according to Plato, correspond to a threefold pattern in human beings: [1] reason, [2] anger and [3] desire.[14] After Plato tripartite structures continue to dominate the Greek philosophical tradition and help to keep it fundamentally at odds with the Afroasiatic legacy in Christianity and Islam. The neo-Platonist triad of the One, Reason and the Soul is central to the teachings of the Christian and Muslim mystics, who are confronted by legalistic opponents inspired by the Semitic inheritance.

The Hebrew Bible

In tackling the problem of the Afroasiatic inheritance's survival in the Bible we shall begin with the Fall (Genesis 2–3). It is clear,

from all the evidence which we have considered and Daum's interpretations of Semitic materials, that we should follow the Fang as seeing the serpent as part of God: both the God of the Bible and the Devil come out of the original Semitic black rain-deity. As we have already observed, a splitting of one deity into two is common in the history of religions. The biblical story does not really make sense unless one takes the tempting serpent to be in some way identical with the God who has presented and forbidden the object of temptation.

A few chapters later the black storm-god reappears in the Flood (6–9). When it has abated Noah sacrifices to God, who establishes his covenant with him and his descendants: God puts his bow in the clouds as a sign of this, saying that in future, when he brings clouds, the rainbow will remind him not to destroy all creatures again. Before long God also makes a covenant with Abraham, after the latter has performed a typically Afroasiatic triple sacrifice of a heifer, a she-goat and a ram. Later, in another covenant, Abraham is told to circumcise himself and the other males in his household as a preparation for begetting Isaac upon Sarah. Sarah, in order to perform her all-important duty of giving Abraham a fertile progeny, has a paradoxical 'qualifying disqualification' of a kind familiar to the student of comparative mythology: she is very old and has had no children (15–18). (Such 'qualifying disqualifications' are common in Indo-European myths: in order to be the father of an important family a man has to be impotent, and in order to protect his people from outsiders he has to be of mixed blood, just as a god or human has to lose one or both eyes in order to see the future or distribute wealth and good luck.) Subsequently, in the story of Abraham, Isaac and the ram in the thicket, we have a typically Semitic motif of child-sacrifice being replaced by the sacrifice of an animal (22).

God's promises to Abraham are renewed in a dream vouchsafed to Jacob, who, in another Afroasiatic gesture, sets a stone up as a sacred pillar and pours oil on it (28). As we have seen, Jacob wrestles with God by a wadi in the night (32), and Moses is also threatened with death by God in the night before the latter is thwarted by a circumcision (Exodus 4): the stories look like reflections of a myth in which the 'black god' is killed. Further on, Moses is told by God to establish the Passover, and this is

linked to the 'redeeming' of first-born sons, dedicated to God, with the sacrifice of an animal (12–13:16). Then God goes before the Israelites as they leave Egypt, in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (13:21–2). The pillar of cloud brings on darkness and early nightfall (14:20). In Sinai God again appears in a cloud, along with thunder and lightning (19:16). He gives instructions for more typically Afroasiatic sacrifices: a bull and two rams (29:1–34) and one ram at dawn and another 'between dusk and dark' (29:38–42). God also demands that the Israelites smash the sacred pillars and poles of other peoples (34:13). Later he explains that if obeyed he will grant rain at the right time, fertility and other benefits, but if disobeyed he will wreak a savage revenge before remembering his covenants (Leviticus 26:3–45).

It is the Book of Joshua, however, which yields the richest correspondences with the archaic materials surveyed by Daum and myself. I shall compare the story of Joshua's attacks on the cities of Jericho and Ai with the Yemeni folktale *Donkey's Skin*, which, as we have seen, is linked by Daum to the 'little pilgrimage' to Mecca, with its sevenfold circling of the Ka'ba – a festival which is the counterpart of the Passover.

After Moses dies Joshua becomes the leader of the Israelites as they are about to cross the Jordan. Joshua sends two of his men across the river on a secret mission, to spy out the country and the city of Jericho. The two men come into the city and stay in the house of a helpful prostitute, Rahab. When the king of Jericho hears of the men's presence Rahab hides them on the roof of her house, where she makes them promise that her family's lives will be spared when the Israelites take the city. Then Rahab lets them down by a rope hanging from a window of her house, which, we are told, was built into the city wall. The rope is tied in the window as a signal that the family in the house is to be spared (Joshua 2).

This preliminary encounter with a helpful prostitute is, I suggest, paralleled in the Yemeni folktale. The prince, Donkey's Skin, comes to a city ruled by a sultan, and, in a scene which serves as a preliminary to the main action, the sultan's youngest daughter falls in love with him. This princess will subsequently give Donkey's Skin every assistance, notably when, standing on

the roof of her father's castle, she will choose him as her husband, in spite of her father's opposition.

In the biblical narrative the Israelites then cross the Jordan, at the time of the harvest (Joshua 3:15), and, as we have seen, there is a mass circumcision on the tenth day of the first month (4:19–5:3). It is noteworthy that there has been an interval of forty years since all previous circumcisions. The circumcised fighting men who came out of Egypt all died in the wilderness, and it is their sons who are circumcised just after the crossing of the Jordan (5:4–7). It is tempting to compare this with the forty-year interval between the circumcisions of fathers and sons among the Oromo. On the fourteenth day of the month the Passover is celebrated, and the next day the Israelites eat local produce. Near Jericho Joshua meets the 'captain of the army of the Lord', who holds a drawn sword (5:13–15). This looks like the original encounter in the wilderness between Donkey's Skin and the daughter of the king of the genies, who is going to give him a magic sword. For six days the armed Israelites make a single circling of Jericho with seven priests, and on the seventh day this is done seven times (6:1–15). This resembles the episode in *Donkey's Skin* in which the sultan of the city decides to marry his seven daughters off. The sultan makes his daughters stand on the roof of his castle while armed suitors ride round it seven times: the daughters have to choose their husbands by throwing fruit for them to catch. Seven suitors are successful, the seventh being Donkey's Skin.

After the fall of Jericho the Israelites are soon involved in hostilities with the king of Ai (7:2–5 and 8:1–29). Joshua sends 30,000 men to lie in ambush to the west of Ai, while he himself goes into a valley in the night. Then he and some followers draw the king and citizens of Ai out of the city, feigning flight into the wilderness. God tells Joshua to point his dagger at the city, which is duly captured by the men in ambush. Joshua and his party massacre the citizens of Ai, and the king is captured alive and hanged. Similarly, in the Yemeni folktale Donkey's Skin and his new in-laws are soon involved in hostilities with a nearby sultan. While the in-laws sally forth with an army Donkey's Skin goes into a wadi, gets a magic sword from the genie whom he has met before and single-handedly puts the sultan to flight.[15]

After Joshua the Hebrew Bible is not so rich in passages with

Afroasiatic parallels. One will however note Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter (Judges 11) and the human sacrifice during a famine, in the first days of the barley harvest, performed by the Gibeonites with David's agreement (2 Samuel 21:1–14). Finally, we may observe the bringing of a maiden to the dying David, in order to keep him warm (1 Kings 1:1–14). After this myth gives way to history.

The Dead Sea Scrolls and 'Jewish Christianity'

Although the later parts of the Hebrew Bible are not particularly useful for our purposes, the opposite is the case with the famous *Dead Sea Scrolls*, discovered in 1947 near the village of Qumran, close to the Dead Sea. These scrolls constitute the library of a Jewish religious settlement which existed from the second century BCE to the first century CE. They provide us, as has long been noticed, with a striking picture of dualistic thinking and light-imagery. The Catholic theologian Jean Daniélou pointed out that the scrolls often anticipate elements in 'Jewish Christianity'. In them we hear of two spirits, one of truth, the other of wickedness: the Prince of Light rules over the sons of righteousness, the Angel of Darkness over those of wickedness. Here, to be sure, the pattern shows Iranian influence, as it closely resembles the Mazdean structure in which the Good Spirit confronts the Evil Spirit beneath the 'Wise Lord'. However, it is a pattern which also has behind it a long Afroasiatic and Semitic tradition of opposing the light and the dark. In Jewish Christian texts we read of two ways, of light and darkness. Satan is called 'the Black One'. We are told that one of the most important Jewish Christian sects, that of the Ebionites, believe that God has established two beings, Christ and the Devil, with control over the next world and this respectively. They also see all the true prophets as being accompanied by false ones, in a procession of pairs.[16]

The Gospels

The Gospels present Jesus as an echo of an Afroasiatic or ancient Semitic young god of fertilising water. In an encounter with a woman at a well (a traditional Semitic narrative motif, as

evidenced by Genesis 24:14 and 29:9 and Yemeni folktales)[17] he portrays himself as a source of 'living water' which will leave nobody thirsty (John 4:4–30). At the culmination of the Feast of Tabernacles he again offers to quench anyone's thirst, and declares that whoever believes in him will find streams of living water flowing from inside himself (John 7:37). The royal procession of Jesus into Jerusalem for his ultimate test at the Passover is paralleled in the coming of the young prince for the confrontation with the storm-deity in the Yemeni folktales linked to the spring festival. On the cross Jesus asks his God why he has forsaken him: it is the God of Abraham who is responsible for the killing, like the Egyptian Seth and the Yemeni Jarjuf. When Jesus dies his women followers are involved in the process of escorting his body to a tomb, witnessing the closing of the tomb and buying or preparing spices for anointing the body (Matthew 27:55–61; Mark 15:40 – 16:1; Luke 23:49–56). This involvement of women with Jesus' body is paralleled by the involvement of female figures with dead bodies in Egypt and Yemen: the body of Osiris is recovered by Isis, while that of the Jarjuf's young male victim is recovered by the latter's sister and a female bird. All three victims resemble Semitic young gods of fertilising water, and Jesus and the Yemeni hero are resurrected, while Osiris is sufficiently revived to be able to father a child and come back from the Underworld to help Horus. In between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection there is, according to Christian mythology, a descent by Jesus into Hades, where he is victorious over Satan: this corresponds to the usual Afroasiatic victory of the young hero over the rain-demon.[18] The Resurrection itself involves a meeting with a woman or women very early in the morning – as a Yemeni hero is reunited with his heroine after killing the rain-demon in the night. There will also be a second coming of Jesus, 'like a lightning-flash, that lights the sky from east to west' (Matthew 24:27): this too is like the Yemeni hero, who corresponds to 'Athtar as a god of lightning coming from the east.[19]

Mani and Manichaeism

The religion of Manichaeism is usually seen as the ultimate expression of dualism and the conflicts between good and evil

and light and darkness. Previously Manichaeism was also seen as an 'Iranian religion', of mainly Iranian origin, inspiration and character. In recent decades, however, as more evidence has become available, scholars have taken the view that Manichaeism, although implanted in Iran from its beginnings, really drew its main inspiration from Jewish Christian, Christian and eastern Greek sources. This new view is supported by materials for the biography of Manichaeism's founder, Mani, who was born in 216 CE in Iraq, near the site of present-day Baghdad. He was brought up in a Jewish Christian sect, that of the Elchasaites. After absorbing their teachings Mani, seeing himself as the heir to Jesus and St Paul, rejected the national and legalistic aspects of the Jewish legacy in order to address the whole of humankind with a message of ascetic spirituality. Eventually he was put to death in south-west Iran in 277. Mani's own new religion has been usefully summarised by the main contemporary specialist, the Parisian scholar Michel Tardieu. One essential aspect of it is polarity, which, Tardieu insists, has been wrongly confused with metaphysical dualism. This polarity is that of a combat between gods and demons in the bodies of living beings. The Supreme God remains unchallenged in this, but part of him has been mixed with the darkness of matter, and has to be rescued by the elect in a filtering of luminous particles, which are restored to a land of light.[20] Here the opposition of the light and the dark looks Afroasiatic and Semitic: there is no need to see it as Iranian.

The Afroasiatic Inheritance in North African Christianity

Camps has rightly observed that Baal, worshipped in the form of Saturn, paved the way for the God of Christianity in North Africa, and that the various spirits venerated by the Berbers were succeeded by the saints and martyrs of the new religion. With them the cult of the ancestors also found a continuation. Moreover, the custom of feasting at the tombs of the dead was literally enshrined in a new form of architecture: permanent banqueting-couches were built in masonry around the sarcophagus, used as the table. It was, however, in the violent schisms of North African Christianity that the Berbers best expressed their most striking characteristic: a habitual inclination to extreme disagreement,

supported by fierce tenacity and courage. Through these schisms the Afroasiatic tendency to polarisation has left a strong imprint on the whole of the Christian religion.[21]

This tendency has been noteworthy in the famous Fathers of the African Church. Tertullian is notorious for his quarrelsome personality, one which manifests itself aptly in his vision of the two cities, of God and Satan. Seeing life as a war between the two is an important part not only of his system but of all late antique and medieval Christianity. Not surprisingly, Tertullian rejects the New Testament teaching that charity is the most important Christian virtue. The Afroasiatic insistence on the bipolarity of the male and the female finds its most extreme theorisation in his misogynistic outpourings, which historians believe to have exerted great influence upon western thought. For the Carthaginian theologian, as for the Kabyles, a woman's place is in the home.[22]

It is to the North African Fathers that Christianity owes the doctrine of original sin. Here Augustine is the most significant figure. Augustine had been a Manichaean in his youth, and although his work has traditionally been supposed to constitute a victory over dualism in general and Manichaeism in particular, by apportioning responsibility for sin to Adam and thus humankind, as opposed to some eternal evil principle, he himself was attacked in his later years for holding a position that itself seemed 'Manichaean': the idea of original sin appears to locate the source of evil in man's material nature as being inherently wicked.[23] Here it is not just in the bipolarity of good and evil that Christianity looks indebted to the Afroasiatic legacy, but also in the doctrine of predestination through which Augustine had so much effect on posterity: a belief in the absolute predestination by God of everything is found throughout Africa, and has also been particularly dominant in Islam.[24]

Islam

We have already seen how central aspects of Islam, such as pilgrimage, circumcision and sacrifice, are essentially Afroasiatic. What we must consider here is the Afroasiatic bipolarity of the religion itself. This is most evident in the Qur'an, where there are

two worlds, this one and the next, and two main races, humans and genies. Further pairs are: paradise and hell, believers and unbelievers, east and west, day and night, male and female, past and future, people of the right hand and people of the left, heaven and earth, sun and moon, and piety and wickedness. These pairs are expressed in antithetical verses which for the Muslim constitute the ultimate miracle of unsurpassable eloquence.[25] Not surprisingly, this bipolarity has also found its expression in schisms, in which the North African talent for robust voicing of discordant opinions has again been manifest.[26] The most important schism is that between the majority of Muslims, the Sunnis, and the principal minority grouping, the Shiites, who are distinguished by their extreme veneration for Muhammad's family. The main sub-grouping of the Shiites, the 'Twelvers', recognise twelve Leaders after Muhammad, the first eleven of whom they believe to have been wickedly killed. The murder of the third, Muhammad's grandson Husayn, is commemorated on the tenth day of the first month of the year, with self-flagellation and self-incision resembling what was done in the ancient Middle East for Attis and Osiris, and also the self-flagellation performed in modern Spain at the end of the Lenten preparation for the commemoration of Jesus' Passion, especially in years when rain has been required. In the case of Husayn water is prominent in the rituals, being distributed free and used to immerse portable shrines.[27] Husayn and the other Leaders are in a way identical with one another: thus the murdered eleven Leaders will find their resurrection in the return of the young and hidden Twelfth Leader, who, like Jesus, will come back to bring justice to an unjust world. [28]

Islamic bipolarity has also expressed itself in the development of religious ideas: being and nothingness, light and darkness, and union and separation are only a few of the many pairs which dominate Islamic literature. By contrast, the triads are clearly Indo-European, Greek or Iranian: reason-anger-desire, the One-Intelligence-Soul, religion-fighting-agriculture.[29] The Afroasiatic and Semitic inheritance in Islam has always confronted the Platonist philosophical tradition as alien and inimical. Thus an authentically Islamic philosophy could be constructed only by breaking radically with the philosophy developed before. Just such

a break was made by one great thinker, Sadra of Shiraz in southern Iran (d.1640): he rejected the conventional view that things have immutable essences, and declared that existence alone, as prior to essences, decided its own constant transformations. This existentialism resembles the Hausa conception of a 'universe without things' in constant metamorphosis: just as for the Hausa what matters is an all-pervading 'prosperity' (*lafiya*) in perpetual motion, so that there can be no permanent possessions, so too for Sadra what counts is a continuous and progressive movement of substantive change within existence itself.[30]

The Afroasiatic Heritage in Modern European Thought

The incompatibility between the 'black god' and the Greek philosophical tradition was well perceived by the celebrated French writer Blaise Pascal (1623–62). In the text in which he records his conversion to the religious life he shows himself as having an experience like that of Moses at Sinai:

> Fire
> God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob
> Not of the philosophers and of the scholars.

A few lines later he quotes Jeremiah (2:13):

> They have abandoned me, a source of living water.[31]

The 'source' is the God of the Bible. So Pascal's thought is essentially an Afroasiatic rejection of philosophy and reason in the name of piety and the heart. Pascal belongs to a movement which sees Augustine as its main predecessor, and one typically Afroasiatic element in Pascal's doctrine is his Augustinian denial of free will in favour of predestination.

Pascal's natural successor is the Danish Christian thinker and founder of western existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55). Not surprisingly, he devotes a whole book to trying to defend Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his own son, and declares that this can be justified only by moving to a plane higher than that of ethics: the plane of religious faith.[32] Kierkegaard's thought is also Afroasiatic in its dualism: he rejects the dominant philosophy of his time (basically a continuation of neo-Platonism) because it

tries to overcome opposites and reconcile them in a higher synthesis, whereas he wants their antagonism to be maintained.[33] Moreover, like his fellow-existentialist Sadra, and like the Hausa with their 'universe without things', Kierkegaard has an insistence on constant 'becoming': 'A self, every instant it exists, is in a process of becoming, since the self in potentiality is not actually there, but is only that which it is to become.'[34]

The strongest trace of the Afroasiatic inheritance, however, is to be found in the work of the Viennese founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Two important aspects of the Afroasiatic legacy are also important aspects of Freud's thought: first, the relationship between the sexes, and, secondly, the opposition between successive generations and in particular between father and son. In Freud's work both of these aspects are combined to revive the ancient Afroasiatic myth of the killing of an old male figure by a young rival for his bride. Freud has been much derided for his imaginative reconstruction of a primal horde in which the father kept all the women to himself. The father, Freud imagined, would have been killed by his jealous sons, and this killing would have been re-enacted by sacrificing an animal representing him. Significantly, Freud insisted that his speculations were not to be taken literally, and were deliberately expressed in an imprecise manner, with a condensation of hypothetical developments and subject-matter into a very brief outline, owing to 'the reserve necessitated by the nature of the topic'.[35] Today Legesse's fieldwork on the Borana gives him much support: the all-powerful Borana father spends his family's riches on acquiring young wives for himself, instead of providing 'bridewealth' to give his sons wives and adulthood, and these sons, naturally jealous, long remain deprived of both. Thus when the sons eventually do reach adulthood, by killing the *butta* bull (a sacrifice from which the father, significantly, is excluded), it is indeed a symbolic killing of the father.[36]

Final Remarks

I have already stressed the difficulty of distinguishing what is Afroasiatic from what is inner African. It may be added that there are further difficulties in trying to define what is Afroasiatic by

concentrating on elements that are widespread in Eurasia: fertility and rain-making rituals and male-female polarity. Yet more problems arise when one tries to isolate 'Afroasiaticness' by reference to the myth of the hero who rescues a princess from a water-demon: the story is found from Scotland and Scandinavia to south-east Asia and Japan.

The most convincing answer to these problems is probably that these widely-encountered elements result from diffusion from Semitic-speakers in Syria, following the 'Neolithic revolution' there, with the invention of agriculture and domestication of livestock. This revolution would have been exported more easily to other Afroasiatic-speakers, owing to their linguistic and social affinities. After that Afroasiatic dualistic logic would have reinforced the revolution's legacy and preserved its sharpest features, thereby producing, in the traditions of the different branches, the strong similarities that have so often struck us in our survey.

Notes

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42. Ibid., pp 70–3. In 1940 the Austrian scholar Dominik Josef Wölfel (1888–1963) published another source for the study of the Canary Islands, a work by an Italian, Leonardo Torriani of Cremona, who came to the Canaries in 1584 and spent many years there. This source seems to me to confirm what is found in Hooton, without adding much of value as concerns religion. Wölfel's conclusions resemble Hooton's: the role of

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