

MYTHOLOGY



Tribal Myth

- Our knowledge is second-hand from travelers, missionaries, colonial administrators and from the field notes of anthropologists. Some tribal peoples have produced writers; we have to rely on what these authors choose to tell us.
- There are thousands of forgotten stories; mythical narratives generally travel easily from one group of people to another; they may change in the process as they are told and retold.
- Myths are made from a store of ideas and images generated in countless previous performances that exist in the memory of the narrator, and also in the memories of all those who not only hear, but participate in the performance.
- The participation of the “audience” in story telling typically takes the form of questions and comments, which stimulate both the **memory and the imagination** of the storyteller.

Tribal Myth 2

- Myths lack identifiable authors and exist in multiple versions. They can often be considered anonymous stories that seek to explain the origins of the world, including human society and culture. Roy Willis in *World Mythology* argues that myths in this cosmic sense appeared prominently in pre-scientific societies ranging from the simplest to the most sophisticated type of social organization.
- We find them in unstratified societies reliant on hunting and gathering, which of all human communities are the most intimately dependent on nature. Examples include hunter-gather peoples of North and South America, Southeast Asia, Australia and Africa, as well as Polar Inuit.
- On the other hand, some of the most complex mythologies stem from societies that have sufficiently freed themselves from dependence on their environment to develop a hierarchy which includes a privileged intellectual shamanism or priesthood. Examples include ancient India and Greece, China and Japan, the Dogon, Bambara and Yoruba peoples of West Africa, the Incas of South America and the Mayan and Aztec peoples of Central America, as well as the Celtic and Germanic peoples of northern Europe.

The Shaman

- Willis notes that a fertile ground for **myth making** is the type of small-scale society where people are more or less equal and where there is little occupational specialization or class structure. The nearest thing to a specialist is **the shaman, the expert in exploring invisible worlds above and below the human domain and in bringing back, for the benefit of all, knowledge and wisdom from these realms.**
- **The shaman's work resembles that of the modern scientist based on the accumulation of experience gained first hand by experimentation, but also like that of the priest, concerned with the domain of the spirit.**
- Yet the shaman also possesses a kind of **creative freedom** which is characteristic of neither scientist nor priest, but rather belongs to the artist. The world of myth originates in the scientific and religious artistry of the shaman; its most conspicuous aspect is that of *play*.
- **Creative play is the essence of myth-making. Although myth ceaselessly changes and develops, it somehow never loses touch with its roots in tribal shamanic experience.** Because this experience is about the interconnections between all aspects of life – visible and invisible, terrestrial and celestial, human, animal, vegetable and mineral – myth cannot be but all-embracing, cosmic in its range. Thus myth registers and conveys meaning in the deepest sense.
- **It is a meaning that plays with its hearer or reader rather than imposing itself.** This is the secret of its universal and continuing appeal.

Written Language

- We have very limited knowledge of the development of ancient stories and how they evolved and changed during the Neolithic period.
- We can only speculate on the gradual elaborations, modifications and development of stories over thousands of years. Good narrators develop a sense of what audiences want to hear at their deepest level of thought.
- **The literate civilizations of antiquity have bequeathed a legacy of more recent writings bearing witness to Neolithic oral mythology.** Pottery with inscriptions and scrolls came into existence after 3000 BCE. These written materials represent the end results of a long process of selection and ordering. Much of what we know of the history of mythology, religion and paganism stems from these sources. Written documents gradually emerged after the start of the ages of metals – bronze (around 3000 BCE and iron 1200 BCE).
- Fortunately scholars have accumulated many of these stories and their research makes it possible to enjoy and learn as a result.

Value of Primitive Mythologies

- Eliade indicates that all the great Mediterranean and Asiatic regions have mythologies, but it is better not to begin the study of mythology from the starting point of Greek or Egyptian or Roman mythology. Most of the Greek myths were recounted, and hence modified, adjusted, systematized, by Hesiod, by the rhapsodies and Homer. The mythological traditions of the Near East and of India have been sedulously reinterpreted and elaborated by their theologians and ritualists. This is not to say that other archaic works have not been rehandled by priests and bards.
- Nevertheless, he argues it is better to begin by studying myth in traditional and archaic societies. The myths of “primitives” still reflect a primordial condition and can help set a myth in its original sociological or religious context.
- Mircea Eliade. *Myth and Reality* (1963) Harper and Row

Value of Primitive Mythologies 2

- When the missionary and ethnologist C. Strehlow asked the Australian Arunta why they performed certain ceremonies, the answer always was: **“Because the ancestors so commanded it.”**
- The Kai of New Guinea refused to change their way of living and working and they explained: **“It was thus that the Nemu (the Mythical Ancestors) did, and thus we do likewise.”**
- Asked the reason for a particular detail in a ceremony, a Navaho chanter answered: “Because the Holy People did it that way in the first place.”
- Tibetan ritual: “As our ancestors in ancient times did—so we do now.”
- Hindu theologians and ritualists: “We must do what the gods did in the beginning” (*Satapatha Brahmana*, VII, 2, 1, 4).
- Hopefully our review of mythology will reflect this spirit.



Creation, Cosmic Architecture and Disasters

- Wikipedia indicates a creation myth is a symbolic narrative of a culture, tradition or people that describes their earliest beginnings, how the world they know began and how they came into it. They are commonly considered *cosmological myths*—that is, they describe the ordering of the cosmos from a state of chaos. They are also commonly considered sacred accounts and can be found in nearly all traditions.
- Charles Long, (1963) *Alpha: The Myths of Creation*, is credited with describing five basic types of stories.
 - Creation *ex nihilo* in which the creation is through thought, word, dream or bodily secretions of a divine being.
 - Earth diver creation in which a diver, usually a bird or amphibian sent by a creator, plunges into the seabed through a primordial ocean to bring up sand or mud which develops into a terrestrial world.
 - Emergence myths in which progenitors pass through a series of worlds and metamorphoses until reaching the present world.
 - Creation by the dismemberment of a primordial being.
 - Creation by the splitting or ordering of a primordial unity, such as the cracking of a cosmic egg or a bringing into form from chaos.

CREATION

- The riddle of how the world came to be is a central problem for all mythologies.
- Sometimes the beginning of all things is described as a **total emptiness or void, or alternatively, as a limitless expanse of water and undifferentiated waste clothed in darkness** – an idea common to mythical narratives of the Middle East, the Khoisan peoples of southern Africa and many traditions of North America and Southeast Asia.
- Despite the enormous diversity of cultures in North America, there are relatively few types of myths about the creation of the world. Most Native American peoples attribute the conception, if not the making, to a supreme deity of “**Great Spirit**.” The actual deities often include animal figures, i.e., the Spider in the West, an **Earth Diver** (often a lowly creature) that goes to the bottom of the primeval sea and retrieves mud.
- The **turtle** plays an important part in Cheyenne accounts. Maheo, “All Spirit,” created the Great Water together with water creatures and birds. The birds grew tired of flying and took turns to dive and look for land. They failed until the coot tried. When he returned, the coot dropped a little ball of mud from his beak into Maheo’s hand. As Maheo rolled the mud in his palms it expanded and soon there was so much only old Grandmother Turtle could carry it. On her back the mud continued to grow; in this way the first land was created.
- In Egyptian myth the primordial act of creation was the raising of a mound of land out of a watery abyss called Nun. The Benu bird was said to have flown over the waters of the Nun and came to rest on a rock from which its cry broke the primeval silence; this determined what was and what was not to be in the unfolding creation.









Creation 2

- The most widely distributed creation image depicts the primal universe in the form of an egg, containing the potentiality of everything within its all-enveloping shell.
- The usual pattern is for some sort of action to occur imitating a process of change and development.
- For the Dogon people of West Africa, a vibration set up by Amma, the creator god, burst the confines of the cosmic egg and liberated the opposed divinities of order and chaos.

Creation 3

- Willis indicates in all mythologies that the initial meaning of creation is the appearance of separation and plurality in place of oneness and undifferentiation.
- In the Chinese cosmic egg story, when the divine ancestor Pan Gu had grown inside the shell for 18,000 years, the egg exploded into two parts, the light half forming the heavens, the dark half forming the earth.
- In the Maori creation myth, the world began when the two creature beings, Rangi the male sky and Papa the female earth, broke apart from their immobile embrace in the void and assumed their opposed and complimentary positions in the cosmos.
- The same theme is also found in some versions of the Greek creation story, in which the first gods to appear were Uranos, the male sky and Gaia, the female earth.

Life Out of Death

- In many traditions, creation is brought about by sacrificial death.
- The cosmic giant Pan Gu gives up his life to bring the world into being. In the darkness of a primordial egg, Pan Gu, said to be the first living thing and said to be the offspring of Yin and Yang, the two vital forces in the universe, grew for 18,000 years until the egg split open. The light and clear parts of the egg floated up to create the heavens and the heavy and opaque parts sank to form the earth. Pan Gu stood up. To prevent the fluid earth and the sky from coming together again, he grew taller, forcing the ground and the heavens apart by ten feet a day.
- After another 18,000 years, the earth and the sky solidified in their present positions and Pan Gu wearily laid down to rest. He died and his breath became wind and cloud, his voice thunder, his left eye the sun, his right eye the moon, and his hair and whiskers the stars in the sky. The other parts of his body became the elements that make up the earth, including mountains, rivers, plants, trees, metals, gems and rocks. His sweat was transformed into the rain and dew.
- In other Pan Gu versions many opposites in nature, male and female, wet and dry and light and dark were formed in the egg. While Pan Gu grew he also created the first humans. Pan Gu died from the effort of creation and from his body all the natural features of the earth arose. In later versions the alternation of the night and day is explained by the opening and shutting of Pan Gu's eyes.



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Life Out of Death 2

- In Saharan Africa the world was originally made from the numerous segments of the sacrificed cosmic serpent Minia, god's first creation – an event remembered in animal sacrifice in the region to this day. Her head is the sky and her tail is the waters that lie beneath the earth.
- In Norse mythology the three creator gods slaughter the bisexual primeval giant Ymir, forming the earth from his flesh, the sea from his blood, the mountains from his bones, the trees from his hair and the sky or vault of heavens from his skull.

Cyclical Worlds

- Some mythologies formalize the struggle between creative order and destructive chaos in terms of a **perpetual cycle of creation** and destruction, by which worlds are unendingly brought into existence, destroyed and remade.
- In North America the myth-making imagination of the Hopi people portrays a **series of worlds, the first of which is destroyed by fire, the second by freezing, the third by flood; we are now in the fourth world which is also due to come to an end soon.**
- A similar mythology is that of the Aztecs of Central America, who tell of the successive creation and destruction of four worlds or “Suns” previous to the present universe. These earlier worlds and their inhabitants had been created, then destroyed by the catastrophic action of various deity figures. The present world is the fifth sun and the **Aztecs saw themselves as the “People of the Sun” whose divine duty it is to wage cosmic war in order to provide the sun with his *tlaxcaltiliztli* (“nourishment”).** Without it the sun would disappear in the heavens. Thus, the welfare and the very survival of the universe depends upon the offerings of blood and hearts to the sun.









Cyclical Worlds 2

- Graeco-Roman tradition describes five successive ages, each associated with a different race of men. It begins with the **Golden Age** when human beings enjoyed eternal youth and freedom from toil, and concludes with the present era, **the Age of Iron**, which is destined to end in humanity's self-destruction.
- The most philosophically elaborate creation cyclical mythology is perhaps that of Hindu India. The great god Vishnu, resting on the coils of the cosmic serpent Ananta in the waters of chaos, emits a lotus from his navel, which opens to reveal the creator god Brahma. From Brahma's meditation the world is created, lasting an immense amount of time before dissolving back into chaos, from which a new universe eventually emerges in exactly the same way. Each of four successive eras within a world cycle is inferior to the previous one.
- In Hindu religious text, the Puranas, Vishnu is described as having the divine color of water-filled clouds, four-armed, holding a lotus, mace, conch and chakra (wheel). The blue color indicates his all pervasive nature, blue being the color of the infinite space and the infinite ocean. A crown should adorn his head to symbolize his supreme authority. He rests on Ananta: the immortal and infinite snake. The conch shell or *Shanka*, named "Panchajanya," represents his power to create and maintain the universe. The chakra (wheel) symbolizes the purified spiritualized mind. The mace or *Gada* symbolizes his divine power as the source of all spiritual, mental and physical strength. It also symbolizes the power to destroy materialistic or demonic tendencies. The lotus flower represents spiritual liberation, divine perfection, purity and the unfolding of spiritual consciousness within the individual.









Dia de la Raza

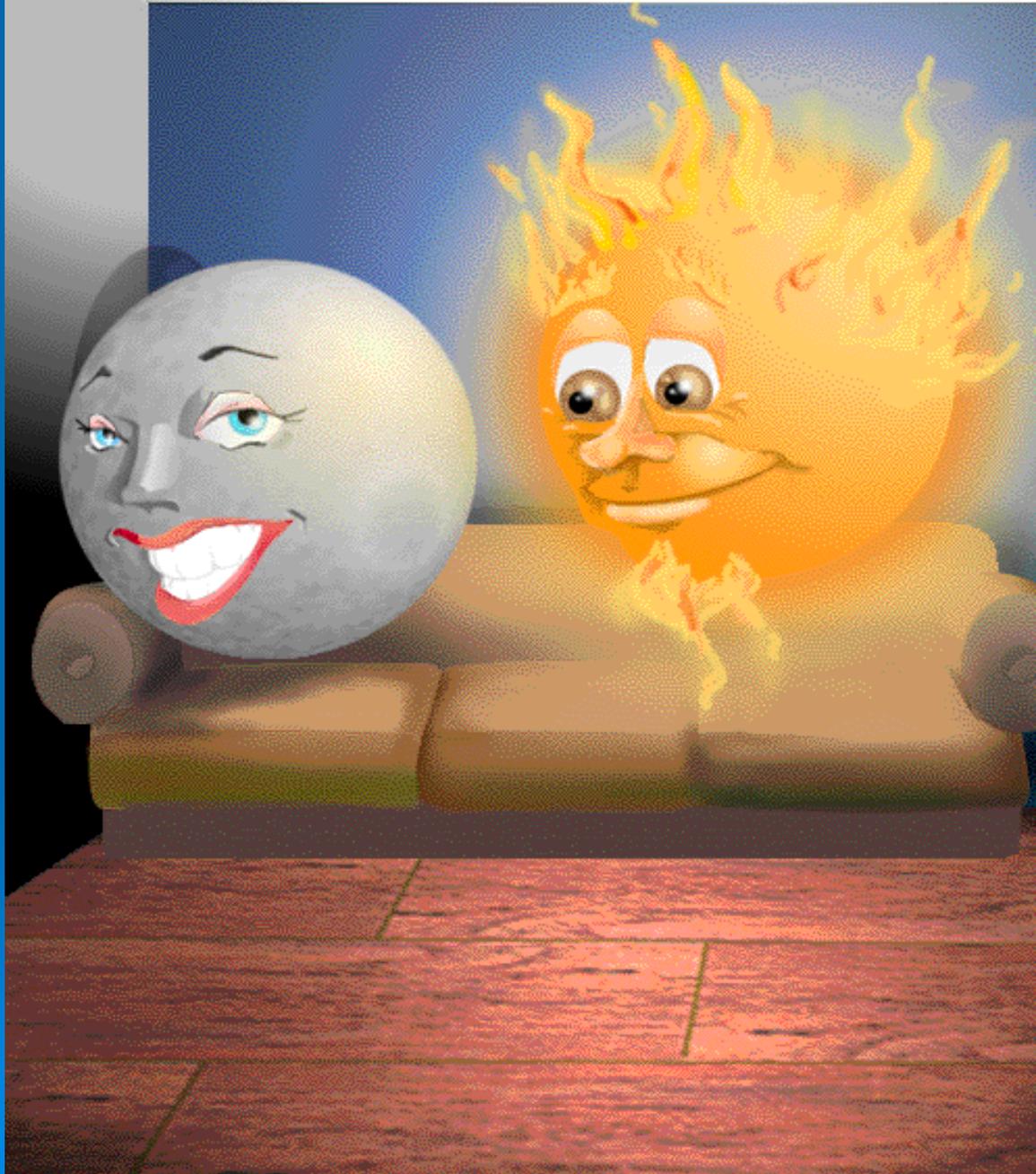
- October 12 (or the Monday nearest to it) is traditionally celebrated throughout the Americas as the day Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492.
- In Spanish speaking countries it is known as *Dia de la Raza*, the Day of the Race.
- Cristobal Colon following the newly accepted theory that the world was round and not flat (older mythology), sailed west from Spain to find a new route to China or the East Indies. He wanted also to prove his calculations of the earth's circumference.

Cosmology

- Bohall suggests that knowledge of the heavens and the seasons was extremely important to the life of the ancient hunter-gathers and agriculturalists. The roles of the shaman and guru as weather forecaster and advisor had to be of utmost importance to the survival of tribes and clans.
- Hence the universal interest by all tribes in *cosmological mythology*, the cycles of the moon and stars and the ability to predict times of rain and drought, cold and hot temperatures and times of potential danger from floods and fires.

Sun and Moon

- Throughout the Americas, a common myth explains the female sun and the masculine moon as that of sister and brother who are also illicit lovers. Their incestuous and clandestine meetings take place at night when the sun secretly creeps into her lover's bed. Being unable to see him in the dark, **she paints dark patches on his cheeks** so she will be able to recognize him later.
- In Africa the cyclical changes in the apparent shape of the moon are said to go back to a time when Moon unwisely began to boast about his loveliness, which he claimed to exceed that of Sun. In anger Sun broke Moon into small pieces. Ever since, Moon has been scared of Sun and **only rarely does he dare to show his whole self in the sky.**



Structure of the Universe

- In myth the visible world of everyday life or middle world is always part of a large whole. Most traditions describe the invisible components of the universe as a world above or heaven, the abode of superior beings, gods or divine ancestors and an underworld, peopled by the dead and by subterranean spirits.
- In many mythologies there is a central pillar or axis (axis mundi) that unites the three worlds constituting the cosmos. Sometimes this central axis takes the form of a World Tree. The best known is Yggdrasil of Norse tradition. Other notable examples are those of Ngaju Dayak people of Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) and the Mayan peoples of Central America. A similar concept is the Tree of Life which occupies a central position in the Kaballah, the Hebrew mystical tradition.
- Axis mundi symbols appear in every region of the world. The image expresses a point of connection between higher and lower realms (sky and earth) where compass points meet and functions as the *omphalous* (navel), the world's point of beginning. Christmas tree, skyscraper, totem pole, obelisk, lighthouse, mountain and many other forms are common. It can be feminine (umbilical providing nourishment) or masculine (a phallus providing insemination into a uterus).



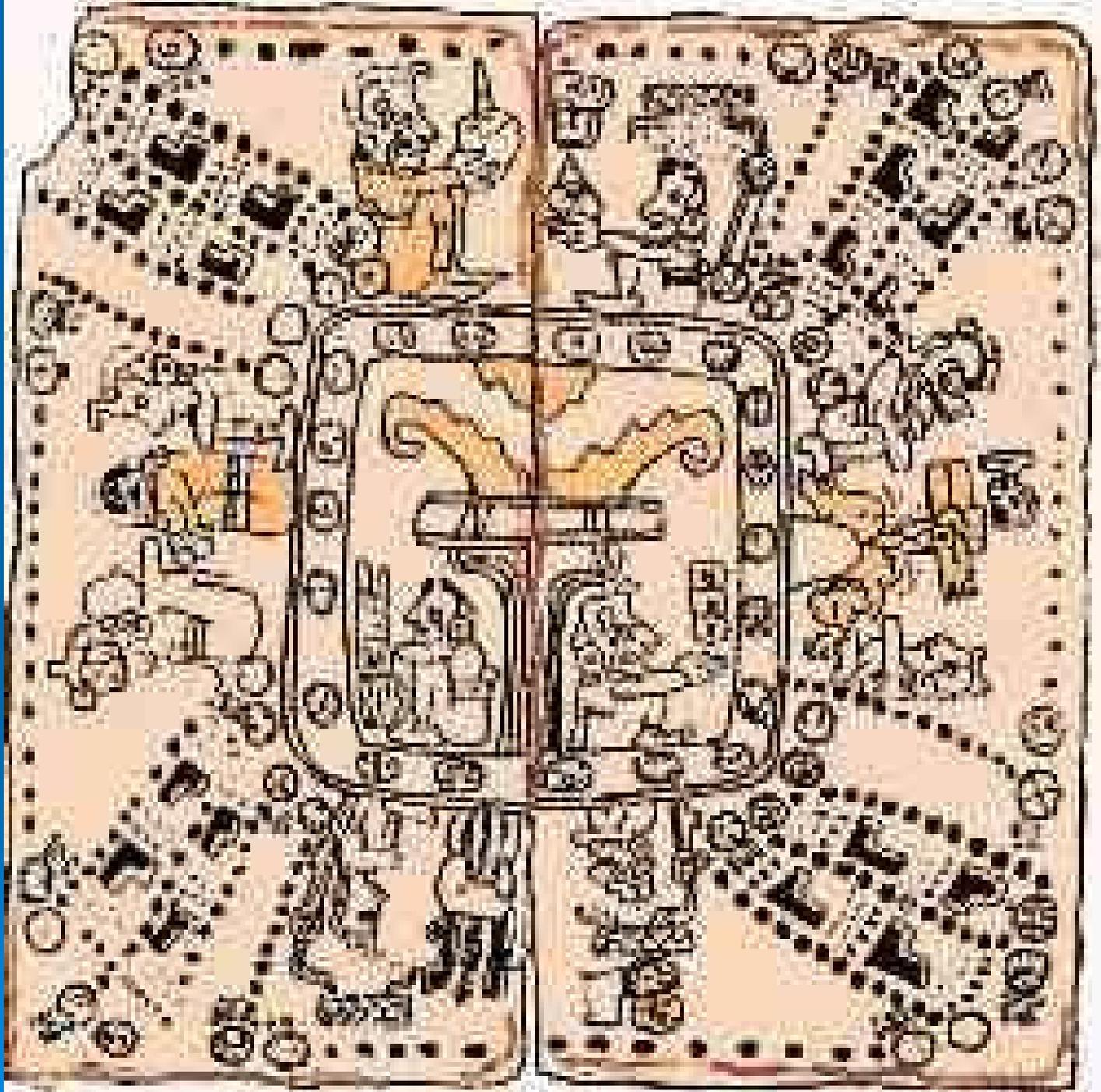
Yggdrasil

- Icelandic mythological poems in *Prose Edda*. In the center of the land is a mighty tree, World Ash, Yggdrasil, guardian of the gods. The gods go daily to Yggdrasil (Odin's Horse) to hold their courts. The branches extend far into the heavens. Roots go down into the underworld, and beneath them bubbles a spring, source of hidden wisdom. A nimble squirrel, Ratatoskr, scurries up and down the ash carrying "malicious" messages between the eagle at the top and the serpent gnawing at its roots. A hart feeds on the branches, and from its horn flow mighty rivers; here also grazes a goat, which yields not milk but mead for the warriors in Odin's hall.
- Odin was said to have hung in agony from the tree, in voluntary sacrifice, to gain power over the runes, which brought knowledge to those who could interpret them. Dew drops from Yggdrasil to earth and fruits of the tree give help in childbirth. It is a symbol of universality linking the different races of beings, and forming the center of nine worlds. From the lake under the tree come three "maidens deep in knowledge." The maidens "incised the slip of wood," "laid down laws" and "chose lives" for the children of mankind and the destinies of men.
- There is much more about the Norse gods of the time. The nine worlds are unknown: they likely are in the sky, underground, and/or may reflect lateral directions, a Pole Star or a rainbow bridge.



Prose Edda

- Voluspa: An ash I know there stands
Yggdrasill is its name
a tall tree, showered
with shining loam
From there come the dews
that drop in the valleys.
It stands forever green over
Uror's well
- Havamal I know that I hung on a windy tree
nine long nights,
wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin,
myself to myself,
on that tree of which no man knows
from which its roots run.





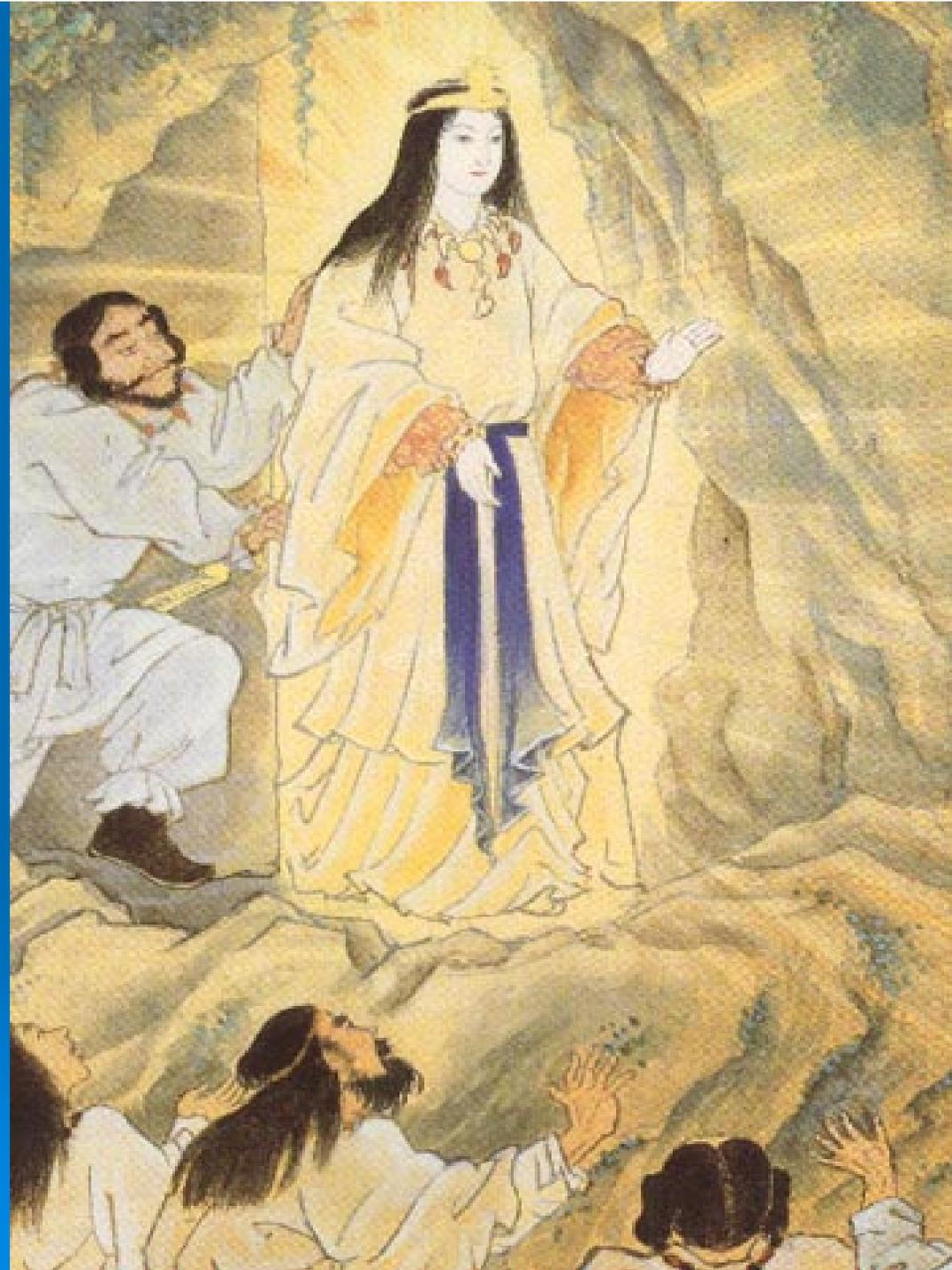
Four directions and the elements

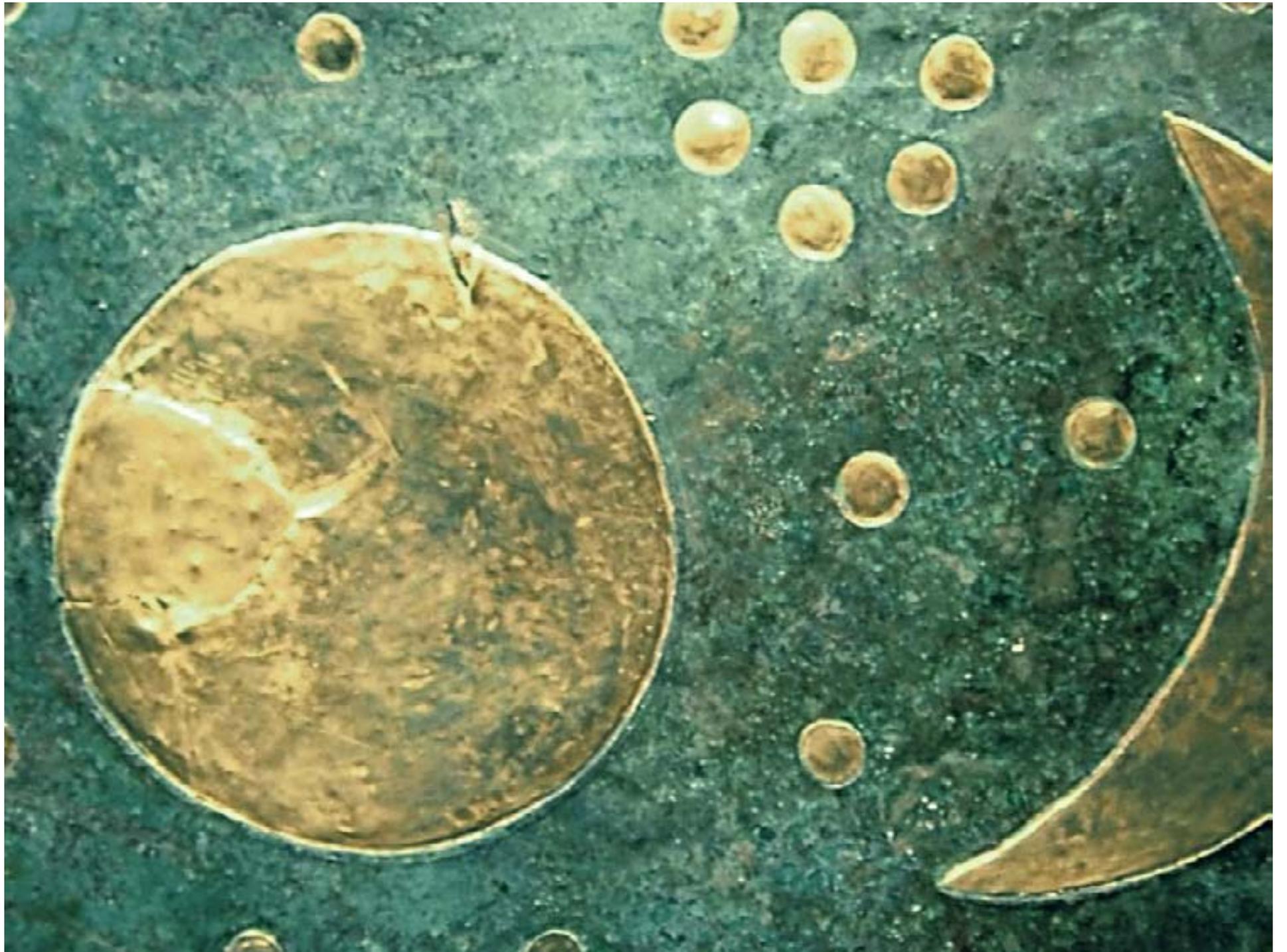
- The mythical universe has a lateral as well as a vertical structure. Throughout the world, ancient traditions describe the four quarters that correspond to the cardinal directions (east, west, north and south). A further “direction” – the center or “here” – is sometimes added, as in China, Celtic Ireland and North and Central America. It could include “up” or “down,” so making a universe with six dimensions.
- In mythology of the eastern Mediterranean and North and West Africa, the universe was thought to be constructed out of four elemental substances: air, fire, earth and water. In most of the Saharan and West African traditions each direction was associated with one element: east with fire, west with water, south with air, north with earth. Air and fire were reversed in the eastern Mediterranean and with the Dogon of Mali, West Africa. China added wood as an element to center.



The Heavenly Bodies

- The celestial bodies commonly appear in myth as living things, variously divine, human or animal. The sun appears most often as a male divinity as in the ancient Egyptian cult of the sun god. However, as we have seen in the Americas, the sun can also be female (the goddess Amaterasu in Japan) and the moon male.
- Certain grouping of stars are also personalized. In the Southern Hemisphere, the constellation of the Pleiades is regarded in the myths of South America, Southeast Asia and Australia as a group of sisters whose appearance in the night sky heralds the onset of rains.
- The Greeks identified the constellation Ursa Major (the Great Bear) with the nymph Callisto, whom Zeus placed in the heavens as a bear, together with her son Arcas, the “bear keeper.” The part of this constellation which we call the Plough or the Big Dipper is known to Native North Americans as the heavenly bear.





The Sacred Skies – Inca Calendar

- ...The Inca world-view manifested itself in a rich tapestry of beliefs, which correlated earthly events with those of the night sky. ...The stars themselves were regarded as lesser deities and as the patrons of certain early activities.
- Particularly prominent were the Pleiades, know as Collca (the granary), and considered to be the celestial guardian of seeds and agriculture. Together with several other constellations, they were used to construct a sidereal lunar calendar.
- The Pleiades were also important for prognostication of agricultural fertility and animal husbandry. The star group know as Orqo-Cilay (the multicolored llama), was thought to protect the royal llama flocks from harm, and Chaska-Qoylor (the shaggy star) was identified with Venus as the morning star.
- Llamas were among the most prized sacrificial animals, and were offered on mountaintops at the new moon. Black llamas were starved during October in order to make them weep and thereby sympathetically petition the deities for rain.



Inca Calendar

- The Inca calendar day by day counting system was followed from observation stations. All movements of the sun, moon, stars and occurrence of the solstice, equinox and all types of celestial phenomenon were observed. The Inca observation stations historically were called *intiquata* from inti, that means sun, and quata that means year.
- Each intiquata had many yancas (kind of Inca astronomers) working in 24- hour shifts. They often operated in an empty square building with carved places in the walls for observing the skies.
- The yanca's knowledge was used by architects to orient construction with the stars, by religious officials to determine when ceremonies should start and by agriculturalists to determine when the lands have to be prepared and even the day to seed the fields. Basically, nothing was done before asking for advice of the yancas.
- The Inca government built hundreds of intiquatas all over the kingdom because each calendar was designed for that specific area, dealing with different temperatures, altitudes and traditions of the people that lived there. The current calendar is for 5511.



The House as a Cosmic Model

- In many parts of the world, houses or dwelling places are characteristically modeled on a mythological picture of the universe.
- The roundhouses of the Venezuelan Yekuana tribe are designed as imitations of the primordial structure built by an incarnation of the sun god Wanadi. The central house-post (topped by a sculpture of a crimson-crested woodpecker, the animal form of Wanadi's incarnation) symbolically links the netherworld of lost souls with the middle earth of men and the vault of heavens; the two crossbeams are oriented north-south to mirror the appearance of the Milky Way in the night sky; and the main entrance faces east, permitting the rising equinoctial sun to shine onto the central post.



Myths of Humanity

- Humanity is very broad and can cover a range of topics. Our goal will be to look at the origins of humankind, origins of woman, myths of sexuality, food and farming, origins of fire, origins of misfortune and origins of death. We will tend to leave supernatural beings and spirit and the afterlife for a future lesson.
- Willis notes that, surprisingly, many mythologies around the world have comparatively little to say about the creation of human beings. According to one Greek myth, the first man was created from clay and the first woman from earth. There is no one single account.
- The image of pot making frequently appears in African creation mythology. Believing that God shapes children in the mothers womb, women in Rwanda of child-bearing age are careful to leave water ready, before going to bed, so that God may use it to form the clay of which human beings are made. The Dinka of southern Sudan say that God fashioned people from mud, just as pots and toys are made by the people themselves.
- In North America, a **Hopi myth** describes the first human beings as formed from earth by Spider Woman, the creator divinity.



Myths of Humanity 2

- In Africa myths usually speak of the Creator as making humans in some place apart, from which they are then introduced into the world. Some stories have them falling from the sky at the beginning of time, while the Herero of southwest Africa say that people emerged from “a tree of life” in the underworld.
- Another African motif is the idea of God making a vessel from which human beings later come forth. The Azande tribe of north central Africa version of this story relates that men were originally sealed inside a canoe, together with the sun, moon, stars, night and cold; the sun managed to melt the seal and humanity emerged.



First Humans

- Egypt: First deity, Ra-Atum, one of the nine Gods of Heliopolis, created first a division into male and female gods who became lost in the Nun. Eye, a fiery power, found them and the first humans were formed out of Ra's tears on being reunited with his children.
- Babylonian myth: Marduk, king of the gods, takes the Tablet of Destiny from Kingu and kills him. From his blood, mixed with earth, he creates mankind.
- India: Brahma produces a lovely young woman as a daughter from his body. The union of father and daughter produces the first man.
- China: Creator goddess Nu Gua produces people from flicking a vine coated with watery mud; each droplet becomes another human being.



First Humans 2

- The Pawnee relate how Tirawa (Arch of Heaven), their primordial divinity, ordered the Sun and Moon deities to unite and produce the first man, while the Morning Star and the Evening Star were told to produce the first woman. Similar stories exist with minor variations for other Native Americans.
- Southeast Asian myths carry the implication that all things in the world have one source or are otherwise closely connected to each other. The Dayak of Borneo believe that humans, animals and plants are all descended from the same spirit and are therefore related. The Chewong of Malaysia suppose that children are metamorphosed flowers.

First Humans 3

- The idea of the first woman as a physical offshoot of the first man is seen in the Biblical story of God making Eve from Adam's rib (likely dates between 600 and 400 BCE). The many parallels include a Central African myth which has the first woman created from the left knee of the first man.
- In the second version, likely several centuries older, Yahweh (God) made Adam from dust and breathed "the breath of life" into his nostrils, created animals so he would not be alone and made Eve from his rib. Like other earthly paradises in mythology of the arid Near East, Eden was a well-watered fertile place.
- The traditional reading of "rib" has been questioned recently by feminist theologians who suggest it should instead be rendered as "by man's side," supporting the idea that woman is man's equal and not his subordinate. Even in ancient times, the presence of two distinct accounts of the creation of the first man (or couple) was noted. The first account says *male and female [God] created them*, implying simultaneous creation, whereas the second account states that God created Eve subsequent to the creation of Adam.

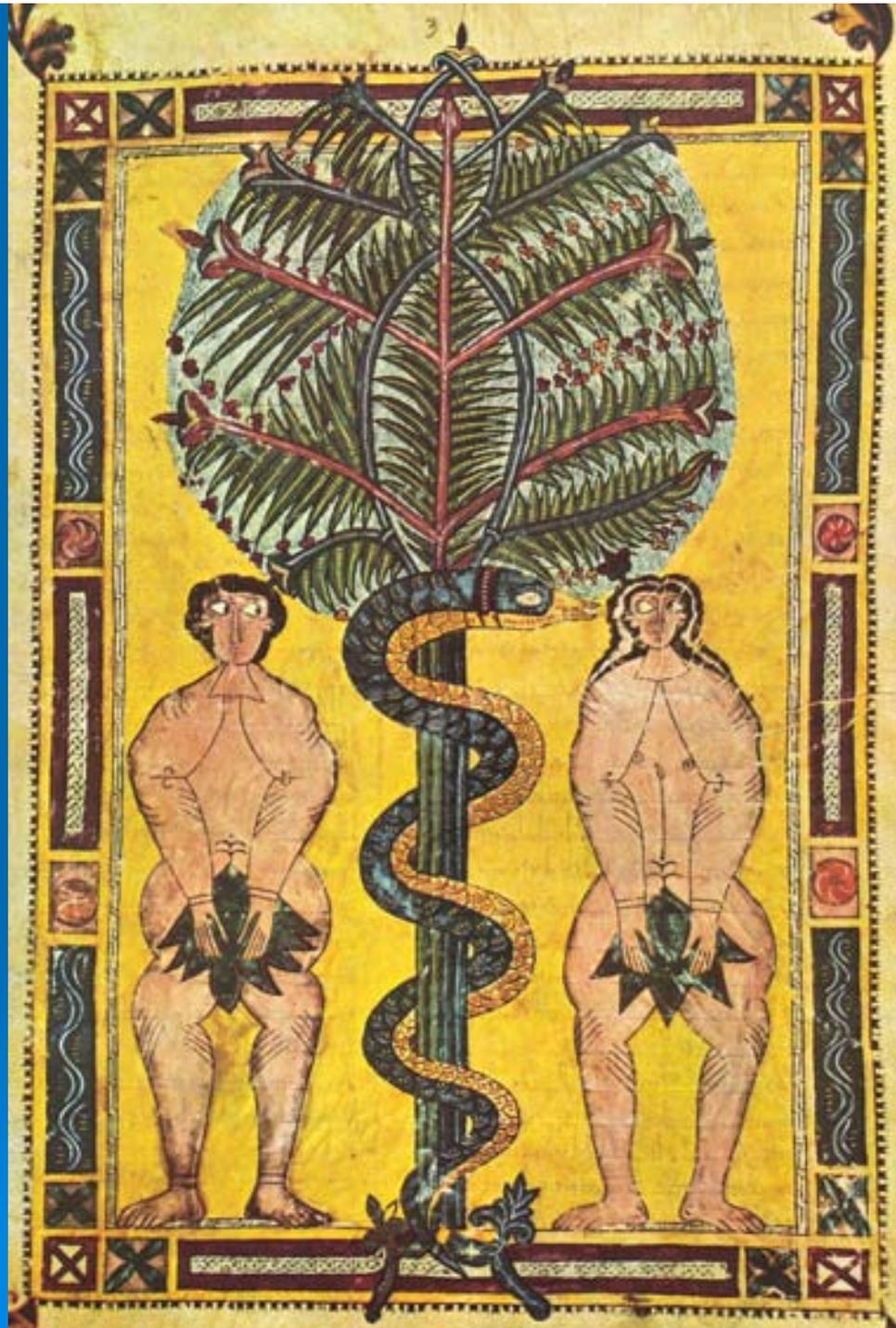
Adam, Eve and Eden Etymology

- “Adamu” is the name in the Sumerian mythology for the first man, created by the “Enki”, the creator god and inventor of civilization. Adam is Hebrew for “man” and *adamah* is a Hebrew word signifying dust and earth, and in Aramaic signifying blood. Etymologically it is related to the words *adom* (red), *adomi* (ruddy) and *dam* (blood).
- The Eden motif itself, and the biblical tale of the flood, are in fact far older than the Bible; dating back at least to the civilization of Sumer and perhaps 5000 to 6000 BCE. *Edin* is the Sumerian word for an uncultivated plain, so “Eden” (reaching English by way of Akkadian and Hebrew through a chain of lexical borrowing) simply describes lowland geography like the present-day southeast Iraq where the Tigris and Euphrates meet. Professor Zarins and other experts believe that the Garden of Eden lies presently under the waters of the Persian Gulf, and they further believe that the story of Adam and Eve in—and especially *out*—of the Garden of Eden is a highly condensed and evocative account of the shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture.



Adam, Eve and Eden Etymology 2

- The Etymology of Eve is of interest. In an ancient Sumerian poem Enki the water god angered Mother Goddess Ninhursag by eating eight magical plants. She put a curse on Enki and he became very ill. She relented and summoned eight healing dieties, one for each ailing organ. The Sumerian word for “rib” is “ti”, but the same word means “to make live.” The healing deity who worked on Enki’s rib was called “Nin-ti” or both “lady of the rib” and “lady of the live”. This did not translate into Hebrew but the rib itself went into Biblical accounts and “Eve” came to symbolize the “mother of all living”.
- The oldest material in the Hebrew Bible—an therefore in the Christian Old Testament—may date from the 13th century BCE along with later material between the 5th century and 2nd century BCE.



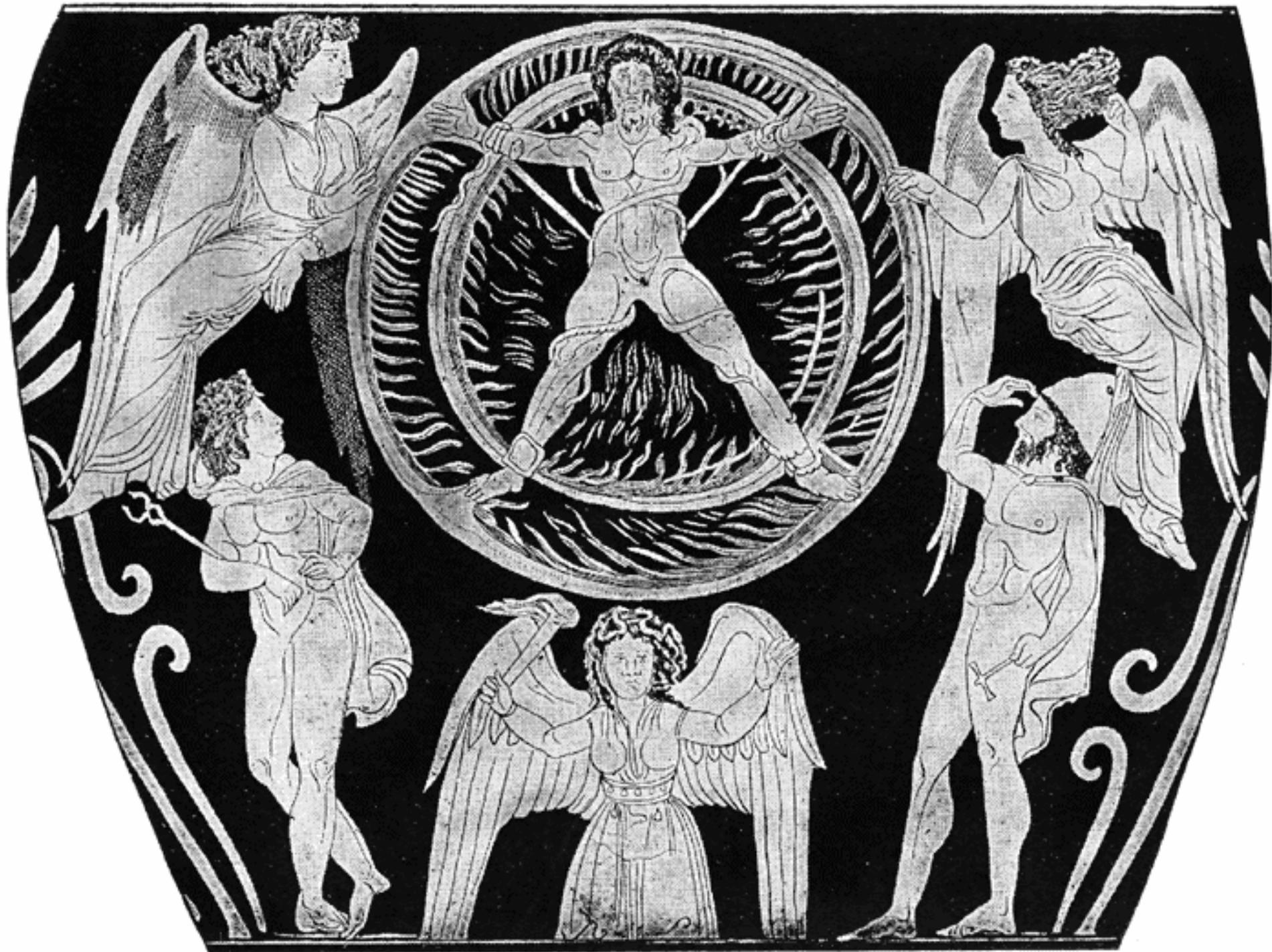
Myths of Sexuality

- A myth sung at the Tongan *kava* ceremony relates how an eel had intercourse with Hina, a noblewoman whose virginity is revered and protected by the community. When she becomes pregnant and tells people what has happened, they capture the eel and cut it to pieces except for the head, which Hina keeps and buries. From the head sprouts the first coconut.
- Melanesian myths often relate how plants grow from ground made fertile by semen or menstrual blood. Soido, the culture hero of Kiwai Island off southern Papua, tries to have sex with a woman, but his penis is so large that he kills her in the attempt. He then ejaculates and shakes semen over the island. Where it lands, all the different vegetables grow.
- The Maori relate how the god Rongo-maui went up to heaven to his brother Wahnui, who was the keeper of the sweet potato or yam. Rongo-maui hid it in his loincloth and then returned to earth and made his wife, Pani, pregnant. She later gave birth to the first earthly yam, which was given to humans.



Myths of Sexuality 2

- Many Greek myths tell of transgressions and their punishment. Their stories may have been told to help maintain the proper order of things, especially within the family, as many of the myths involve overstepping the bounds of sexual propriety.
- **Oedipus** was the most celebrated sexual transgressor. He is the prime example of the Greek hero who possesses all the noble heroic qualities but is nevertheless condemned by fate to commit grave crimes against the natural order. He would **murder his father and marry his mother**.
- One notorious sexual transgressor was Ixion, king of the Lapiths, a race of Thessaly. He attempted to rape his mother Hera, but she deceived him by putting in her bed a cloud in her shape, with which Ixion mated when he was drunk. Zeus punished Ixion for attempting to seduce his wife by condemning him to be tied to a wheel which would turn forever in the underworld. The offspring of Ixion and the cloud was Centauros, who later became a sexual transgressor himself by coupling with a mare to produce the first Centaur.



Food and Farming

- Sumerian cosmogony has to be pieced together from a variety of origin myths. The ultimate origin of all things was the primeval sea personified as the goddess Nammu. She gave birth to the female earth goddess, Ki, whose union in turn produced the “great gods.” Among these was Enlil, source of the ordered universe, responsible for vegetation, cattle, agricultural tools and arts of cultivation. The same role is ascribed to Enki who is god of wisdom and is the possessor of *me*, a central concept of Sumerian religion. The *me* are pre-ordained divine decrees (probably on tablets) of Sumerian religion and society.
- Wikipedia indicates Enki was later know as Ea in Akkadian and Babylonian mythology. He was the deity of crafts; also, of mischief; water, seawater and lakewater; and intelligence. The name translates as “Lord of the Earth” (the Sumerian *en* means the equivalent of lord or high priest and *ki* means earth. His grandson Enki, chosen to represent the younger gods, takes on all duties including fertilizing powers as lord of the waters and lord of semen. Royal inscriptions of the 3rd millennium BCE mention “the reeds of Enki,” a very important building material. Enki symbols include the goat Capricorn.
- He assisted humanity in irrigation, granaries and medicine. He instructed Atrahasis to construct some kind of boat for his family, or brought him to the heavens in a magic boat. After the seven day Deluge the boat landed and a sacrifice was organized to the gods.



Food and Farming 2

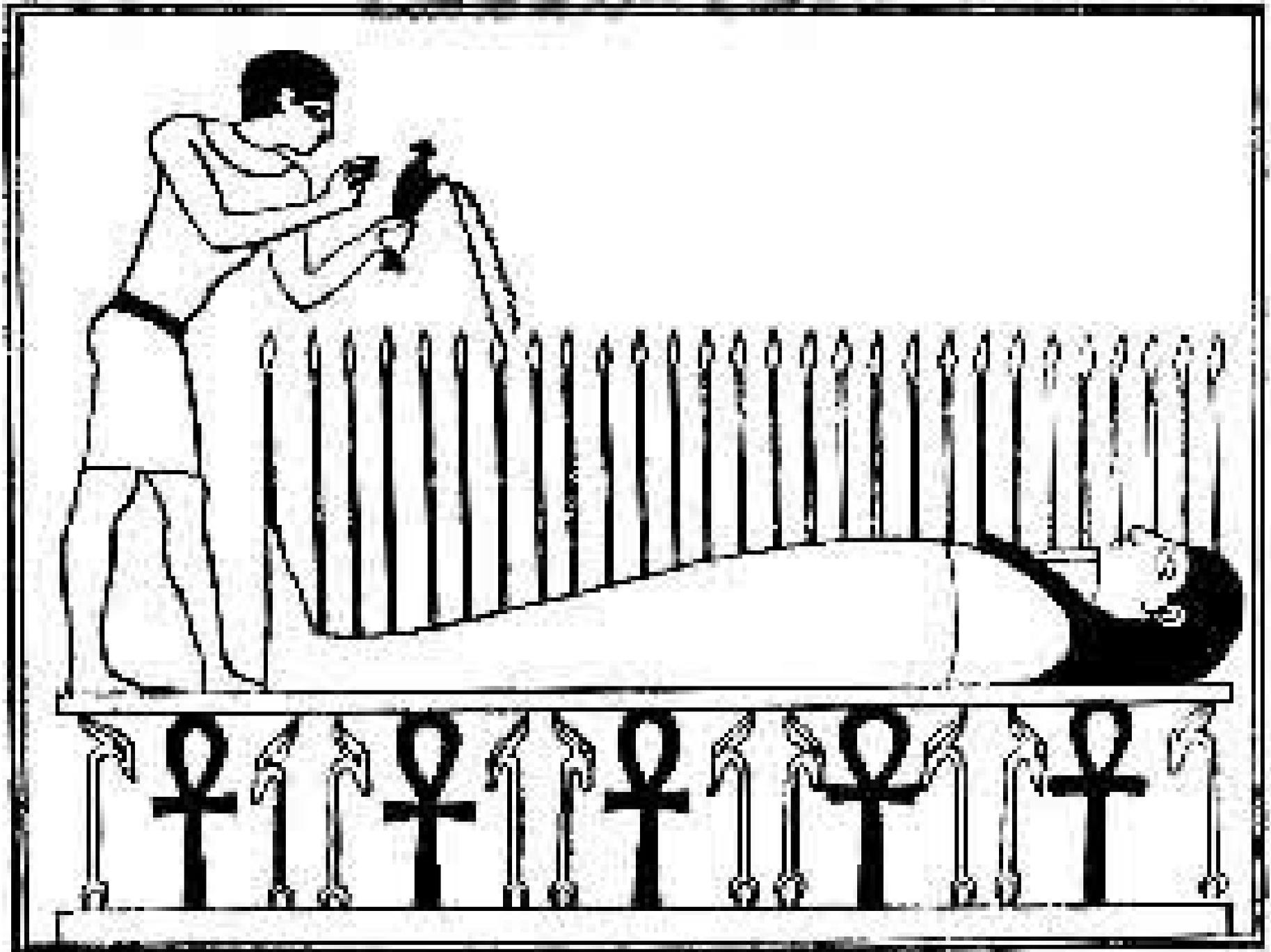
- Enki was not perfect; as god of water he had a penchant for beer and as god of semen he had a string of incestuous affairs.
- Enki, in summary, is a god or symbolizes gods of civilization, wisdom and culture. He was also creator and protector of man and of the world in general. Temples and shrines to Enki were found at Nipper, Girsu, Ur, Babylon, Sippar and Nineveh.
- Animals play a major part in Native American mythology because they are believed to possess a close kinship with humans. For example, some peoples of the Northwest coast believe that their ancestors were animals which landed on the beaches and took off their animal guises, becoming human and establishing various clans. The hunting and killing of beasts is carried out in accordance with numerous important rituals and myths. Animals are regarded as an important source of spirit power.
- The mythology of the Arctic regions reflects a harsh dangerous environment—a lonely landscape with a thinly spread population. Agriculture was impossible and all food must come from animals. Critical to survival, animals were regarded throughout the Arctic as having souls of their own, and were respected accordingly; it was common for the hunter to apologize to the animal he had just brought down.



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Origins of Fire

- In a dispute with Zeus, Prometheus fostered the development of men, who had been treated as equals in the days of Kronos but were now regarded as beneath the gods. Zeus became furious and in revenge withheld fire from humans, who were forced to live without heat and light. Prometheus came to their aid and stole a flame from the forge of the god Hephaistos, hidden in a stalk of fennel.
- Maui, a Polynesian culture hero, stole fire for humans from its keeper, the ancestor heroine Mahui-ike who lived in the underworld. He tricked her into relinquishing her burning fingernails, the source of fire, one by one, until she had only one left, which she flung to the ground, starting a blaze. Maui called upon the rain to put the fire out, but Mahui-ike saved a few sparks by throwing them up onto the trees. As a result of this action they knew they could use wood to make fire.

Origins of Fire 2

- In [Georgian](#) mythology [Amirani](#) challenged the chief god and for that was chained on the Caucasian mountains where birds would eat his organs.
- According to the [Rig Veda](#) (3:9.5), the hero Mātariśvan recovered fire, which had been hidden from mankind.
- In [Cherokee](#) myth, after Possum and Buzzard had failed to steal fire, Grandmother Spider used her web to sneak into the land of light. She stole fire, hiding it in a clay pot.
- Among various Native American tribes of the [Pacific Northwest](#) and [First Nations](#), fire was stolen and given to humans by Coyote, Beaver or Dog.
- According to some Yukon [First Nations](#) people, Crow stole fire from a volcano in the middle of the water.
- According to the Creek Indians, Rabbit stole fire from the Weasels.
- In [Algonquin](#) myth, Rabbit stole fire from an old man and his two daughters.
- In [Ojibwa](#) myth, [Nanabozho](#) the hare stole fire and gave it to humans.
- In [Polynesian](#) myth, [Māui](#) stole fire from the Mudhens (alternative story).
- In the [Book of Enoch](#), the fallen angels and [Azazel](#) teach early mankind to use tools and fire.
- According to the Chewong of Malaysia, a boy fell into the eighth earth below and was frightened; kind people gave him both light and fire for his own earth and showed him how to cook food before helping him to climb back.
- In Aztec mythology, Xolotl was the god with associations to both lighting and death. He also guarded the sun when it went through the underworld at night.

- Fact: Homo erectus likely discovered fire one to two million years ago, much earlier than originally thought.





The Origins of Misfortune

- Whether the world came into existence by accident or design, once created it is seen in all mythologies as subject to arbitrary change. The cause of unpredictable events is often put down to the whim of divinities motivated by such apparently human emotions as sexual desire, anger or jealousy.
- The spite of the Greek goddess Eris (strife), insulted because Zeus had not invited her to go to the wedding of the sea-nymph Thetis to the mortal Peleus, leads indirectly to the Trojan war.
- Greek mythology delivers a similar message in its account of how evil, in the form of sickness and death, came into the world in the first place. After a long struggle Zeus created the first woman, Pandora, to even the score against his supernatural foe, Prometheus. She was sent with a sealed jar (or box) to Prometheus's brother, Epimetheus, who introduced her into human society. She opened the fatal jar in curiosity, releasing into the world its dire contents of evils, including every kind of sickness; only hope remained inside. Throughout this myth, Prometheus appears as the promoter of human civilization



Shiva and Misfortune

- Daksha, father-in-law to Shiva, had arranged a horse sacrifice in accordance with Vedic rites; all the gods decided to attend the ceremony but Shiva was not invited. Shiva's anger was distilled into a drop of sweat on his forehead. When this drop fell to earth, an enormous fire broke out and from it appeared a squat hairy man with bright red eyes and monstrous teeth who burned the sacrifice to ashes, and caused the gods to flee.
- This was Disease, who brought grief and mourning wherever he went. Brahma promised Shiva a share in future sacrifices, begging him to moderate his anger and bring the pestilence he had created under control. Shiva divided disease into many forms.
- Thus it was that everything came to have its own ailment—headaches for elephants, sore hooves for bulls, salinity for the earth, blindness for cattle, coughing for horses, crest-splitting for peacocks, eye diseases for cuckoos, hiccups for parrots, exhaustion for tigers and fever for mankind.



Misfortune 3

- As an observation, there are few explicit gods of misfortune. Many gods and deities are geared to dealing with problems, warding off problems, helping to prevent or cure disease and bringing about desirable outcomes. Mankind tends to recognize a need to appease the gods and to engage in rituals and ceremonies that will ideally enhance the work of various agents and divinities. **In general it is the positive aspects of mythologies that survive the tests of time.**
- Cherokee legend regards snakes as “supernaturals,” having an intimate connection with the rain and thunder gods, and possessing a certain influence over other animals and plant tribes. Snakes are feared and revered and every precaution is taken to avoid killing or offending one, especially the rattlesnake.
- He who kills a snake will soon see others and become dazed at the sight of their **glistening eyes and darting tongues**. One’s fate will be to go wandering about like a crazy man, unable to find one’s way out of the woods. To guard against this misfortune, there are certain prayers which the initiated say in order that a snake may not cross their path, and on meeting the first one of the season the hunter humbly begs of him, **“Let us not see each other this summer.”**

Misfortune and Disease

- In the medical philosophy of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, which were brought to earth by the god Ifa, everyone has in his or her body the causative agents which give rise to disease. These agents are various kinds of “worms,” and a number of each kind are normally contained in “bags” located in different parts of the body. Their presence is said to be necessary for the maintenance of health: disease occurs only when “worms” multiply excessively and burst forth from their “bags.” To prevent this from happening it is necessary to observe moderation in eating, drinking and sex.
- On the other side of Africa, the Mandari people of the southern Sudan attribute the main causes of disease to invasion of the sufferer’s body by spirits, or sorcery by the enemy. Sickness caused by the sky spirit manifests itself as pain in the head or upper part of the body. The cure is ritual sacrifice to persuade the spirits to withdraw. Mandari mythology contains stories of ancient people who had dogs with horns that were featured in rain rituals. Allegedly the Mandari also believe that the primal dogs could speak and warn people of impending danger, and that it was dogs who taught humans the use of fire.

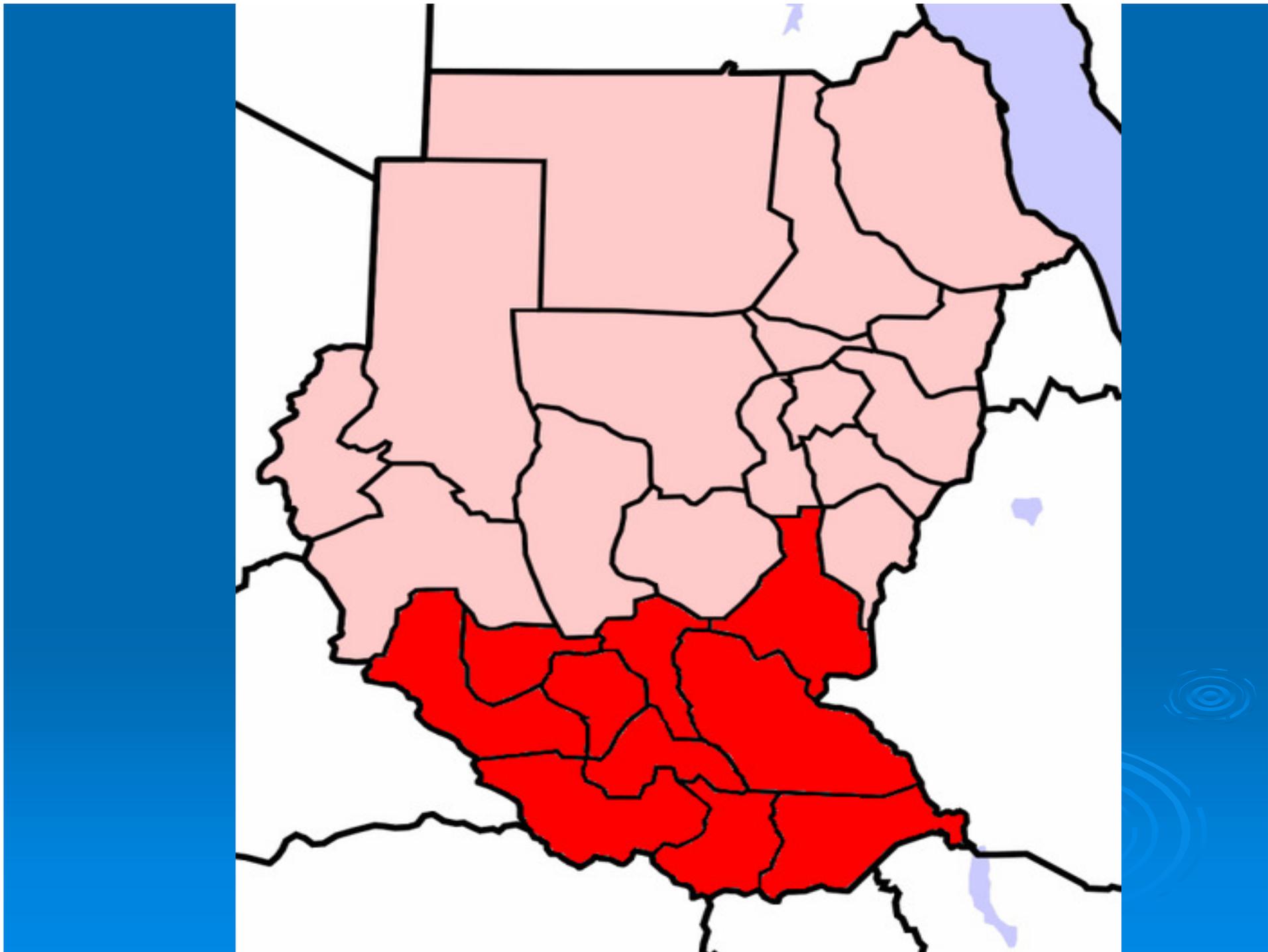
Causes of Death

- Part of humanity is death. We will cover afterlife mythology later in the course.
- Willis indicates that the introduction of evils through Pandora is etched in many other mythological traditions. Polynesian myth connects the origin of death with the creation of the first woman. A Maori version of the story tells how Tane, god of forests and trees, fashioned the first woman from the sand of Hawaiki island. She bore him a daughter called Hine-titama or Dawn Maiden, whom the god then married also. But Dawn Maiden had not known that Tane was her father. When she discovered the shocking fact, she fled to the underworld.
- Tane pursued her there, but Dawn Maiden told him that he had “severed the cord of the world,” and from that time on she would remain in the underworld and pull Tane’s human children down to the realm of darkness. That is how both death and the prohibition of incest came to humanity.



Rope to Heaven

- According to many African peoples there was originally no death, and its arrival is attributed to the transgression either of human beings or some animal. The Nuer pastoralists of Eastern Africa relate how there once was a rope joining heaven and earth. Anyone who grew old climbed the rope and was made whole again by the High God before returning to earth.
- One day a hyena and a weaverbird climbed up the rope and entered heaven. The High God gave instructions they should not be allowed to return to earth where they would cause trouble. One night they escaped and climbed down, and when they were near the ground the hyena cut the rope. When the part above the cut was drawn up to heaven, there was no way that human beings could get there, and now when they grow old they die.
- Lurqun and Stone also indicate that the Nuer provide a mythological account of why some people have white skin and others have black skin. Kwoth (spirit of the sky) gave Europeans white skin as punishment for an act of mother–son incest committed by a pair of their ancestors. Kwoth is a god of over 70 African tribes who is everywhere and nowhere, inside everything but impossible to discover.



Space is Limited

- Most accounts of the origin of death accept the logic that space is limited on earth and death makes room for new life. In North America, myths describing the afterlife are few because people are generally more concerned with the present world than with the next. On the whole the afterlife is regarded as a place much like this world but with more game. The best-known example is the “Happy Hunting Ground” of the Plains people.
- Myths of the origin of death often involve an argument between two beings, as in the following account from the Shoshoni people of the western Plains. In ancient times, the two most important figures were Wolf and Coyote, who always tried to go against Wolf’s wishes. Wolf said that when a person died he could be brought back to life by shooting an arrow into the earth beneath him. But Coyote said it was a bad idea to bring people back to life, because then there would be too many people. Wolf agreed, but decided secretly that Coyote’s son would be the first to die, and by this very wish brought about the boy’s death. Soon grieving Coyote came and told Wolf that his son had died. He recalled Wolf’s words that people could live again if an arrow was shot underneath them. But Wolf countered with what Coyote himself had said, that man should die. Since then it has always been so.





The Grim Reaper

- From ancient folklore and other anthropological sources, it is believed that Kronos was a harvest god worshipped by a culture before the Greeks. It is understood that his sickle was used in harvesting grain. Harvest was also associated with death because it signaled the end of the growing season and the beginning of winter. Time devouring all things was represented poetically by Kronos eating his own children. It was the Greek's very dramatic way of saying nothing lasts forever.

The Grim Reaper wielding a sickle and, at times, an hourglass, is directly derived from Kronos. One must understand how important grain was to these ancient civilizations. How horrible the thought was of some mystic creature with the power to swipe away their whole harvest with a single swing of the mighty sickle. Not to mention the flock of famished crows, which would accompany such a terrible figure. It undoubtedly symbolized death in an extremely effective way. Though the Grim Reaper poses no real threat to our life, his legacy, which has been handed down from generation to generation, has instilled a sense of mystery and respect for death.

- Reference: The Answer Bag. Not bad at all.
- Other terms for the Grim Reaper: Angel of Death (Hebrew); Thanatos, twin brother of Hypnos, god of sleep (Hellenic); Angou (Celtic Welsh); Ankou (Celtic Breton); Giltine (Baltic Lithuanians); Yama, the land of death (Hindu); Yomi, the underworld (Japanese mythology); and Sikhism, one of Gods Angels.

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Stonehenge

- Stonehenge is a prehistoric monument, one of the most famous sites in the world. It is at the center of the most dense complex of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments in England, including several hundred burial mounds. The first iconic stones were erected about 2500 BCE although some of the early phases of the site date to 3100 BCE.
- The site served as the earliest known site for cremations in the British Isles.



