

ASTRONOMY 9: HISTORY OF COSMOLOGY

Handout #3

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Origin Myths: Siberia and the Americas

I. Siberia

- Ambiguous role of devil
 - A) Alarsk Buryats: *When Burkhan Came Down From Heaven*
 - Earth created using undersea mud gathered by devil
 - Devil is rewarded with his own land
 - Devil creates harmful creatures (reptiles, snakes) by driving his staff into the ground
 - B) (Altaic: devil is the First Man!)
 - C) (Evenki: pine-tree contest, devil recognizes god's greater power)
- Raven as mediator between worlds, trickster
 - A) Eskimo: *The Creation*
 - Separation of heaven/earth/sea floor
 - Raven unwittingly creates man from pea-pod, orders man and nature
 - B) Chuckchi: *Creator Makes Men and Animals*
 - Raven sent to peck a hole in the sky for the Sun (fails), wagtail succeeds (just)
- Very imperfect creation
 - A) Chuckchi
 - Subjects of creation are incompetent (failure of raven)
 - Punished by making them scavenge for food (had been provided)
 - God can't find a messenger, must go directly to earth to teach humans to have sex and multiply
 - Russians are entirely outside the creation, self-transformed, but are given role of masters
- Limits to man's dominion over Nature
 - A) Eskimo
 - Raven is displeased if too many animals killed, punishes man
 - Creates bear to instill human fear
 - B) Chuckchi
 - Man created from seal bones
- Astronomical order
 - A) Eskimo
 - Man is punished by taking away Sun
 - Raven's son wants to play with Sun, sets it free part-time = day/night duality, revolution of the sky, stars of glowing grass
- The Fall
 - A) Eskimo
 - Loss of sacred powers as world is more ordered
 - Raven loses ability to ascend to heaven
 - Work for food

II. North America

- Creation by divine thought
 - A) Hopi: *The Emergence*
 - Taiowa (creator) in endless space (no time/shape)
 - Creation arises from his mind, Infinite = finite
 - Creates helper Sotuknang to make manifest: 9 universes, solids, waters, winds
- Creation out of Chaos

- A) Cupeno: *A Bag Hung in Space*
 - Dark initial void, bag appears and coyote, cat arise
 - Man arises from mud
- B) Jicarilla: *In the Beginning Was Nothing*
 - Chaos (dark/water/cyclone) of potentiality
 - Hactin divides Mother Earth / Father Sky
 - Jicarilla emerge from shadowy embryonic dream state
- Earth created from mud gathered under primeval waters
 - A) Kainah (Blood): *Creation of Man*
 - Napioa (Old Man) sends animals to fetch earth
 - B) Assiniboine: *Making Men and Horses*
 - Inktonmi sends animals (all fail until muskrat tries) to dive
 - Man and horses (a recent introduction!) created out of dirt
 - C) Cherokee: *How the World Was Made*
 - Heavenly animals (water beetle) dives for mud
 - Earth is floating on cosmic ocean
 - Attached to sky (of rock) by cords at four cardinal points
 - Stamped into dry land (Appalachians) by Buzzard
 - Sun passes under (day) and above (night) the sky arch
 - Man (brother + sister) created last, multiply at 1/week (too many), then 1/year(!)
- Coyote as mediator between worlds, reconciler of dualities
 - A) Cupeno
 - Has power of speech
 - Links earth/man with heavens (through shamans)
 - Reconciles hunter/farmer duality (scavenges; cf. African myths)
- Differing roles of women
 - A) Salishan–Sahaptin: *Making the World and People*
 - Woman is derived from tail of man (wolf)
 - B) Kainah
 - Women created first
 - Confusion of mouth/sex organs: verbal/physical creation
 - Man is afraid of her until encouraged by Napioa
 - C) Jicarilla
 - Created out of man’s dream
 - Puberty rites established
- The Fall
 - A) Hopi
 - Emergence into the fourth world (see notes)
 - Descent from initial perfection, forgetting the sacred, imbalance
- Interconnectedness of nature
 - A) Salishan–Sahaptin
 - Sky/earth/underworld connected by a pole or trees
 - Humans derived from wolf
 - B) Kainah
 - Tame buffalo created for man’s benefit
 - C) Assiniboine
 - Inktonmi as wolf god
 - Orders a long winter, Frog protests (even after death!) and prevails
 - D) Cherokee
 - Parallel underworld has opposite seasons (spring water temp.)
 - Animals and plants which could stay awake 7 nights awarded night vision, conifers
 - E) Jicarilla
 - Humorous animals (hog) are created and teased

- Man from image of stones/turquoise/ochre/coral/rock/opal/abalone
- Sociopolitical roles of myth
 - A) Assiniboine
 - Justification for stealing other tribes' horses

III. South America

- Creation through speech
 - A) Quiche Maya: *The Popul Vuh*
 - Tepeu and Gucumatz (creators, forefathers, sun/fire) deliberate/discuss in the middle of watery void
 - “Let the emptiness be filled” and it is
 - Praise and invocation essential (for gods' egos?)
 - Gods perplexed that animals don't have power to praise them, and so man is created
- Creation through struggle: cosmic quarrels
 - A) Jivaro: *Nuhino, the Earth Story*
 - Eclipses as a violent quarrel, Etsa (sun, male) pursuing Nantu (moon, female)
 - Incest between gods disrupts nature, offends animals
 - Masata (War) arises, incites tribes to violence
 - Rainbow as a sign of peace, obscured by rain/clouds
 - Chingaso eaten by imprisoned grandson she tries to free
- The gods are fallible
 - A) Quiche Maya
 - Animals intended to have speech but don't
 - First man: clay; melts away, destroyed
 - Second man: wooden, no mind/soul for praise; maimed, killed (animals, pots exact revenge!), and becomes monkey
 - Man from corn (4 => cardinal directions): too much power; wisdom is curtailed
 - Fierce animals turned to stone by rising sun, mud dried
 - B) Munduruku
 - Karusakaibo creates the world
 - With armadillo discovers people in a hole in the ground
 - Delivers half with (umbilical) rope before it breaks
 - Cycle of life <=> death
- “Manifest destiny”
 - A) Inca: *Ordering the World*
 - Sun god sends son and daughter to civilize the “savages”
 - Find a place where golden rod (till, phallus) can be plunged into soil
 - Establish divine right to rule
 - Power to inspire awe equated with “modern” dress, piercings
 - Justification for creation of great Andean empire
 - Ultimately overthrown by the Spanish version, “tears of blood”
 - B) Jivaro
 - European technology is seen but forbidden to Indians
- Role of women
 - A) Quiche Maya
 - “Their women were made” to beget the tribes
 - Water as feminine (passive, receptive)
 - B) Inca
 - Civilization/cities divided into Upper realm (elder, male, king) and Lower realm (younger, female, queen)
 - C) Jivaro
 - Man (sloth) as son of Sun/Moon, woman (wife) from eggs of Chingaso
 - Man is lazy, most of work done by women!