

ASTRONOMY 9: HISTORY OF COSMOLOGY

Handout #4

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Origin Myths: Australia and the Pacific

I. Australian Aborigines

- Little explicit cosmological concern
 - All is pre-existing except humans
 - Origin from thought/dreams at the “Dreamtime”
 - Extremely fertile creator beings
 - Divergent roles of male/female
- A) Wulamba: *Origin of the Aborigines*
- Djanggawal and 2 sisters
 - World not yet ordered: no proscription of incest
 - Division into moieties (halves): Not-being–dead–sea / Being–earthly–land
 - Fertility symbols: dragging on the ground(!); plunging of djuda pole while wandering gives life; sisters store many children within own wombs
 - Women take active/equal role until man shortens their endowments
- B) Aranda: *Great Father*
- Karora asleep in eternal darkness/night
 - Pole of life rises from his head almost to heaven
 - Many children spring from his thoughts, armpit
 - All male, no mention of female!
 - Dawn/light of unknown origin
 - Karora inspires men to hunt; injured wallaby becomes Chief
- C) Kakadu: *Imberombera and Wuraka*
- Wuraka (male) tries to join rising sun; too feeble even to carry own penis(!); inactive
 - Imberombera (female, mother goddess, fertility) wanders, leaves many children
 - Imberombera assigns languages, culture, place

II. Maori (New Zealand)

- Cosmological concern, elements of philosophy
 - Sophisticated myths, attack root of Being/Not-Being duality
 - Absence of anthropomorphic creator being
- A) *The Genealogy*
- Vegetative growth as creative metaphor
 - Root/vine (Being) progresses into Sky/Earth
- B) *Po*
- Evolution of Po (Not-Being, Void)
 - Unseen \Rightarrow Unpossessed \Rightarrow Unpassing \Rightarrow Darkness \Rightarrow Untouchable
- C) *Creation*
- Poetic evolution of Being:
 - Conception \Rightarrow thought \Rightarrow spirit
 - Night
 - Nothing \Rightarrow abundance, life, breath \Rightarrow atmosphere \Rightarrow Moon, Sun (eyes of Heaven) \Rightarrow light
- D) *Heaven and Earth*
- Heaven/Earth (not yet separated) arise from Chaos/Darkness (cf. Ovid)
 - Only god of forests/birds/insects succeeds in raising Heaven \Rightarrow dark/light duality
 - Humans emerge from between (unknown)

- Sky/Earth separation threatens power of Wind god, sends storms as revenge
- Animals retreat to sea (fish), inland (reptiles)
- Only man faces down the Wind, but devours all others to punish them for cowardice
- Wind remains man's enemy (storms)
- Deceitful divine act as origin of Death

E) *Myth of Io*

- Some Biblical(?) elements
- Unlike other Maori myths, has a "supreme being" (Io)
- Primordial darkness/inactivity/water
- Creation by speech \Rightarrow light (childbirth as ritual reenactment)
- Light/dark, heaven/earth contain each other (cf. Tao)

III. Pacific Islands

- Diverse creation metaphors, themes
- Positive being (most common) vs. spontaneous origin in Chaos
- Importance of rock as seed

A) West Ceram: *Hainuwele*

- Spontaneous origin of people from bananas (cf. African)
- Hainuwele (magical girl) arises from coconut/blood mix
- Generative powers, even valuable excrement (Chinese dishes)!
- Others envious and kill her, food arises from body
- Causes separation of earth/heaven: gate as test
- Animals are humans who failed to pass

B) Tahiti

- Positive creator being (Ta'aroa)
- Elements of Maori structure

1. *Ta'aroa*

- Creator exists in Void
- Commands universe (rock, sand, light, germs, etc) to arise out of self
- Islands as divine shell/body

2. *Shells within Shells*

- Interesting hierarchical cosmology
- Ta'aroa in inner shell/egg \Rightarrow dome of sky
- Outer shell \Rightarrow rock, sand
- Body of Ta'aroa \Rightarrow elements of Nature
- Order defined by limiting shells: Sky (space), Earth (stones, water, plants), Woman (man, woman)

3. *Mitigator of Many Things*

- Ta'aroa emerges from shell, creates Tu (War) and myriad gods
- Man created last, earth for his benefit
- Man (Ti'i) cursed by warring gods
- Only female (Hina) can mitigate the curses (eg., waning moon, low tide)
- Male causes end of eternal life, death

C) Banks Islands: *Qat*

- Isles as center of the world, Qat's birthplace
- Qat arises from stone, names self (speech as creative)
- Myriad things and man are created by thought/carving from wood
- All is Light: Qat must purchase and install darkness/night from remote isles
- Death caused by Qat's stupid, bungling brother, Marawa

D) Marshall Islands: *Long, Long, Long Ago*

- Creation by speech/command from water: "Mmmmmm."
- 4 primal men: West (creates all life), South (winds), North (death), East (daybreak)

- Order, rank assigned through tattooing
 - Rat offends natural order ⇒ poor tattoo, dirty
 - Good easily jump across ocean to spirit world, bad are weighed down and fall into waters/Chaos
- E) Maiana: *Making Things*
- Na Areean (creator) alone in space, cloud in Nothing-ness
 - Creation by thought: water (chaos, non-Being) / land (order, Being) in left / right hands
 - Younger version created to inspect world
 - Orientation established by fixing tooth at world's center
 - Light streams through tooth from heavens beyond the sky ⇒ Sun
- F) Hawai'i: *Kumulipo (A Chant)*
- Celebrates richness, abundance of natural world
 - No single, supreme creator being
 - Slime ⇒ Earth
 - Initial time: hot earth, heavens begin to turn, Sun darkened ⇒ Moon, Pleiades
 - Differentiation of male/female ⇒ myriad sea creatures, plants, animals, men of differing heads/classes: social structure (I-V)
 - Creation of line of chiefs, divine rule, food, rats (VI)
 - Fear of night, legal structure, dogs (VII)
 - "Time of Calmness": humans multiply, climax in creation of day/light (VIII)